

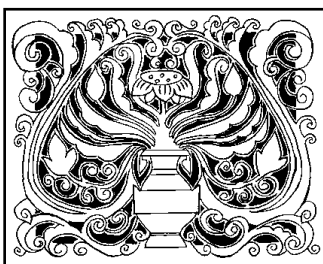


# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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Amrita Kalasha

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COVER: Daylight breaking over  
the lower Himalayas

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## Contents

Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj	facing 651
Traditional Wisdom	651
This Month	652
Editorial: Skilled Service	653
Medicine at Crossroads Swami Brahmeshananda	654
Rethinking Medicine Prof. B M Hegde	659
Vanaprastha Ashrama for the Present Age Dr Pratima D Desai	664
Ahimsa and Hinduism A P N Pankaj	668
A Visit to China Swami Smaranananda	672
A Thai Monk's Glorious Crusade N Karthikeyan	679
Social Seismography in Indian Legal Philosophy Dr N L Mitra	685
Varanasi: Home of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service Swami Varishthananda	689
Reviews	694
Reports	697

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MAHASAMADHI OF  
***Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj***

**W**ITH profound sorrow we announce that Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, fourteenth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, gave up his body and entered mahasamadhi on 4 November 2007 at 5.35 pm. He was ninety-one.

THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE of a man of God—a life of service, dedication, and faith—has finally merged in the Supreme. Let us reflect on the ways in which that life reflected the Divine, in which it touched the hearts of countless men and women.

What, perhaps, struck people most about Swami Gahananandaji were his fearlessness and tranquillity. Join these with his keen observation and discriminating judgement, and one gets a small glimpse of the depths—*gahana*—of his personality. Monks and devotees who knew him a little closely were amazed to see his frugality in food and scant need for sleep. Their amazement was heightened, seeing Revered Maharaj's boundless energy—at all times of day and night. What was the source of this indefatigable energy? It was not merely a regulated life that included daily exercise, not merely his meditation; no, it sprang from his absolute dependence on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda.

Maharaj was always impeccable in bearing and manners, and his carriage clearly marked him as one with authority. His pre-monastic name, Naresh—Lord of men—also pointed towards this aspect of his personality. Organized and methodical, he was imperturbably patient when dealing with difficult people, and showed tenacious grit in the face of adversity. His actions and speech were controlled, announcing his self-mastery, but he reached out to people with warmth and humour, endearing them all to him.

It was at the quiet and verdant Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar, in 1939, that Swami Gahananandaji's monastic journey began. He was then twenty-two. Of course, the fire in the young idealist had been glowing for years. The novice had been inspired by the lives and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna

and Swami Vivekananda right from his school days, in his village of Paharpur (now in Sylhet, Bangladesh). As a youth he was also fortunate to meet some senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order. He had derived great enthusiasm for spiritual life from his cousin Swami Prabhananda (Ketaki Maharaj)—who pioneered the service activities of the Order among the Khasi people of north-east India—and even in his advanced years fondly reminisced about him. Maharaj also felt blessed to have met Swami Abhedananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

The year 1916, into which Swami Gahananandaji, as Naresh Ranjan Raychoudhury, was born, was a difficult one for India and especially Bengal. Not much is known of his family, for Maharaj was reticent about this subject. The roots of Maharaj's deep sympathy for the poor, sick, and distressed must have taken a hold in him during his youth, when the terrible poverty of the Indian people and social upheaval due to the freedom struggle against British dominion had turned the whole of India inside out.

A few months after joining the Bhubaneswar Math, Maharaj received formal initiation from his guru, Swami Virajananda, the sixth president of the Order. Swami Virajananda was a disciple of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, and had received sannyasa from Swami Vivekananda. Maharaj had the great op-





portunity to live with Swami Nirvanananda—legendary disciplinarian and loving soul—who had served Swami Brahmananda, and who would later become vice president of the Order. Swami Nirvedananda was to guide him carefully through the intricacies of monastic life. The future monk came to embrace the new type of monasticism established by Swami Vivekananda, which was to combine the dynamism of meditation, work, devotion, and knowledge, for one's own liberation and for the good of the world.

The novice was diligent in his duties; this diligence was tested during the visit of Swamis Shankarananda, the future (seventh) president of the Order, and Achalananda, a future vice president, to Bhubaneswar and Puri. In 1942 he was transferred to the Advaita Ashrama's publication department in Kolkata. The Second World War caused shortages of all kinds of goods and materials, including paper for printing Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta literature. Maharaj was very resourceful in procuring and storing paper and other commodities. In 1944, his guru initiated him into the vows of Brahmacharya, naming him Amritachaitanya. Despite his busy schedule, Amritachaitanya could visit Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, in the Himalayas, in the winter of 1947–8, for intense studies and meditation, spending over four months there. Soon after his return from Mayavati, he was invested with the sublime vows of sannyasa, and received from his guru the name Swami Gahanananda. Towards the end of his tenure in Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, the young swami was made the manager.

In 1952, he left Advaita Ashrama for the Ramakrishna Mission centre in Shillong. There he was fortunate to receive affectionate guidance from Swami Saumayananda, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda. He twice organized the Ramakrishna Mission's flood relief operations in Assam. His first-hand ex-

perience of people's extreme suffering during those disastrous floods brought about a radical change in him. Keen on service to the helpless, Swami Gahananandaji was shifted from Assam back to Kolkata in 1958, now to the Ramakrishna Mission Seva Pratishthan, a small hospital serving primarily poor mothers and their infant children. He was also guid-



ed and inspired by Swami Dayananda, secretary of the hospital and a disciple of the Holy Mother. For the next twenty-seven years, twenty-two of them as secretary, he served at this institution, transforming it into one of the most comprehensive health care facilities in the city and thus bringing succour to millions. The volume of work shouldered by Maharaj during this period was enormous. He organized mobile medical vans, which bring free medical services and medicines to rural areas, and are a great boon for villagers. He also organized massive relief work



during the 1971 Bangladesh war, when millions of Hindu refugees were pouring into India, into living conditions that could be best described as hellish.

In 1965, Swami Gahananandaji was elected a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and member of the governing body of the Ramakrishna Mission. Appointed as assistant secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in 1979, he continued to run Seva Pratishthan till 1985, and then shifted to Belur Math to devote more time to the growing administrative work. In 1989 he was made the general secretary, a post he ably held for three years. In 1992, Maharaj was elected a vice president, and was appointed head of the Ramakrishna Math, Yogodyan, in Kankurgacchi, Kolkata. His worldwide spiritual ministry commenced, and he began initiating people into spiritual life.

Swami Gahananandaji looked for sincerity and faith in Sri Ramakrishna as the main qualifications for disciples desiring *diksha*, spiritual initiation. He was equally comfortable visiting and initiating simple villagers living in rural areas, where modern living facilities were unavailable, as he was ministering to cosmopolitan people living in modern cities. His calm demeanour, loving attention, and competent handling of spiritual, psychological, social, and even mundane matters endeared his disciples and devotees to him. He encouraged many private

centres and study-circle groups. Maharaj travelled extensively in India and abroad, pushing his body to extreme limits. His assistants may have been exhausted at the end of many a day, but he would be found looking fresh, and smiling. His initiated disciples number 142,955.

In May 2005, Maharaj was elected fourteenth president of the Ramakrishna Order. He continued his spiritual ministry with renewed vigour. Disciples, devotees, admirers, and friends flocked to him for succour and guidance, and he was ceaselessly engaged in meeting their demands. His mere proximity would infuse hope and strength in people, and those with persistent problems found their problems disappearing in his smiling presence.

Maharaj's sturdy body was finally breaking down. Age was prevailing over his strong constitution and stronger willpower. He was admitted to Seva Pratishthan on 4 September 2007 for investigation and treatment of various old-age complications. Despite the best medical attention of prominent experts, and the fervent prayers of thousands of disciples and devotees, Maharaj's condition slowly deteriorated, until, on 4 November, the spirit left the body to soar into the Infinite. His mahasamadhi has left a large void in the hearts of countless disciples and devotees, and is a major loss for the organization which he headed.




# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## Svāsthya: Health

December 2007

Vol. 112, No. 12

ॐ आप्यायन्तु ममाङ्गानि वाक्प्राणश्चक्षुः श्रोत्रमथो बलमिन्द्रियाणि च सर्वाणि । सर्वं ब्रह्मोपनिषदं माऽहं ब्रह्म निराकुर्यां मा मा ब्रह्म निराकरोद-  
निराकरणमस्त्वनिराकरणं मेऽस्तु । तदात्मनि निरते य उपनिषत्सु धर्मास्ते मयि सन्तु ते मयि सन्तु । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May my limbs, speech, prana, eyes, ears, and strength, as also all (other) sense-organs, be nourished. All, indeed, is Brahman, as declared in the Upanishads. May I not deny Brahman; may not Brahman deny me. Let there be no denial (of me, on the part of Brahman); let there be no denial (of Brahman) on my part. May all the virtues described in the Upanishads belong to me, who am devoted to the Atman; may they belong to me! Om, peace, peace, peace! (Atharva Veda, 3.4.1)

त्वादत्तेभी रुद्र शंतमेभिः शतं हिमा अशीय भेषजेभिः ।  
व्यस्मद्वेषो वितरं व्यंहो व्यमीवाश्चातयस्वा विषूचीः ॥

With the wholesome remedies which you give, O Rudra, may I attain the span of a hundred winters. Far from us banish enmity and hatred, and to all quarters maladies and trouble. (Rig Veda, 2.33.2)

समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः ।  
प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ॥

Possessed of a proper balance of the humours, (gastric) fire, secretions, and excretory functions, with tranquil body, mind and senses—such a person is called healthy. (Sushruta Samhita, 'Uttara Tantra', 64)

धीधृतिस्मृतिविभ्रष्टः कर्म यत्कुरुतेऽशुभम् ।  
प्रज्ञापराधं तं विद्यात्सर्वदोषप्रकोपणम् ॥

Unwholesome work done without insight, application, and discriminative memory—know that to be violation of wisdom; and that disturbs all (bodily) humours. (Charaka Samhita, 'Sharira Sthana', 1.102)

Give your body and mind to worldly enjoyments, and the world will destroy them both. Devote them to God and his service, and you will enjoy bodily health, peace of mind, and spiritual joy. (Swami Brahmananda)

# THIS MONTH

The state of a community's health is a vital index of its well-being and developmental status. Health is a complex entity and health care delivery a multifaceted activity. The spirit of service is crucial for successful health-care delivery, though modern medical care demands that this be **Skilled Service**. This number examines some of these aspects of health care.

Globalization, 'technicalization', and commercialization have brought about a sea change in the attitude to and method of health-care delivery in recent times, with several unsalutary consequences. Swami Brahmeshanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh, provides a perspicacious analysis of these issues in **Medicine at Crossroads**.

**Rethinking Medicine** is a critique of the reductionist basis of modern medical care, which underplays the less-known aspects of human physiology and health even as it attempts 'to fix' problems in isolation. This is in contrast to the holistic approach of Ayurveda and Yoga, which are coming to occupy an important place in Indian health care, argues Prof. B M Hegde, former Vice Chancellor, Manipal University.

An ageing population is a direct consequence of improved health care. The problems of the elderly are uniquely challenging, and the traditional Ashrama system of Indian society addressed these problems by assigning a specific functional role to the elderly. Dr Pratima D Desai, co-founder, SEWA-Rural, Jhagadia, tells us how the traditional concept of vanaprastha could be usefully adapted to the present times in **Vanaprastha Ashrama for the Present Age**.

Ahimsa, non-injury, is an integral component of virtually every ethical system, though it has come to be especially associated with Indian religious traditions. Sri A P N Pankaj, a reputed litterateur from Chandigarh, takes a look at **Ahimsa and**

**Hinduism**, the scriptural bases and practical implications of ahimsa in Hinduism.

Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj recently visited China in connection with the release of the Mandarin translation of selections from Swami Vivekananda's writings. He has penned some of his insights on contemporary Chinese culture and society in **A Visit to China**. He is Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.



In recent years Thailand has recorded significant successes in controlling the Aids epidemic, and Buddhist monks have played a crucial role therein. Sri N Karthikeyan, a nuclear physicist and social activist from Colombo, presents a fascinating report of **A Thai Monk's Glorious Crusade** against the Aids menace.



In the second instalment of **Social Seismography in Indian Legal Philosophy**, Dr N L Mitra examines the issues of ideological and material dialects, rational jurisprudence, integration of legal reasoning, and some aspects of the law in relation to social change in India. The author is former Director, National Law School, and Founder Vice Chancellor, National Law University, Bangalore.

The Ramakrishna Order has been associated with Varanasi right from its early days. In **Varanasi: Home of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service**, Swami Varishthanandaji, a monastic member of the Home of Service, recounts some of the many associations of the founders of the Order with Varanasi and the tradition of seva that vivifies the Home.





### ***Skilled Service***

**J**HANDU Bhatt, the famous nineteenth-century Ayurvedic physician of Kathiawar, was as famous for his philanthropy as he was for his astute clinical skills. His house, which virtually served as a hospital, would remain full of patients suffering from diverse diseases. Patients would be served with medicines as well as diet free of cost, a venture that landed Bhattji in serious debt.

Swami Akhandananda has given a remarkable picture of Bhattji's devotion, both to his profession and to his patients. One day, on returning from his morning walk, Swami Akhandananda found 'an uncouth looking person suffering from a skin infection which covered his body. He was lying on Bhattji's own bed, and a woman was massaging the man with oil. Bhattji was sitting nearby, slowly turning the leaves of an Ayurvedic treatise. Seeing the extraordinary scene, Swami Akhandananda asked Bhattji what it all meant. The physician then told him: "The fellow had been a slave to inordinate sexual indulgence. The Ayurveda prescribes that such a person should lie on a soft bed before a physician, while being massaged with oil by a woman. I have followed the instructions, and am now searching for the medicine." "But why on your bed?" asked the swami. "Because it would take time to get a soft bed ready for him," Bhattji replied nonchalantly. Not surprisingly, the patient was not only cured, he became an inmate worker of the physician's house.

The tradition of medical service in the Ramakrishna Order has also been shaped by several legendary figures. Swami Saradananda, the first general secretary of the Order, was expert in nursing, both in scrupulously carrying out medical instructions and in providing the moral and spiritual support that one especially needs in times of sickness. He would have no qualms about taking up the personal care of patients suffering from such serious ailments

as tuberculosis and smallpox, both of which, besides being highly infectious, had no known cures at that time.

Swami Kalyanananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Kankhal, also exemplified an extraordinary spirit of service. Swami Sarvagatananda recalls, 'Kalyan Maharaj did not teach us how to serve others merely by words—his own life was a model of dedication. Even in the dead of night, if he heard a sound coming from the hospital, he would silently get up, slip his shoes on, and head for the hospital. ... He would then check the patients without disturbing them, and if they were not sleeping, would ask them if they needed anything. Having made a round of the wards, he would return to his bed. This used to happen two or three times every night—and Maharaj never told anyone about it!'

That such dedication bears extraordinary results is seen in the life of Swami Muktananda, popularly known as Ban Bihari Maharaj. Dressing wounds devotedly for six decades at the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi, he came to possess the healing touch that made even intractable wounds respond to his care.

Is this dedication compatible with high academic standards? For Jhandu Bhatt, it was. He refused a handsome remuneration from the ruler of Wadhwan because he could not cure his tuberculosis. 'Our books say,' he opined, 'the patient won't die if the diagnosis is properly made.' And that was reason enough for Bhattji to work hard on his clinical skills. What would Jhandu Bhatt have done in today's commercialized, technology-driven medical world? He would probably have been no less successful. For, in the ultimate analysis it is persons that count, on whichever end of the machine they may be.



# Medicine at Crossroads

Swami Brahmeshananda

THREE professions can be considered the noblest: those of doctor, teacher, and monk, because in these three professions, three gifts are made: *arogya-dana*, *vidya-dana*, and *jnana-dana*. Traditionally, in ancient India, all these gifts of health, learning, and spiritual knowledge were made freely, without a stipulated fee. However, doctors, teachers, and spiritual instructors would generally receive a *dakshina* from their beneficiaries—a voluntary gift which could vary from a paisa's worth of fruit from a poor villager to a fortune from an emperor. There are interesting examples of such gifts, one of which I would like to mention here, since it reflects how a physician, a *vaidya*, by making a *dakshina*, influenced the whole course of a monastic community.

At the time of Bhagavan Buddha, there was a famous physician called Jivaka. Once he treated Buddha, who, being a monk, could give as *dakshina* nothing but his blessings. Soon after, Jivaka had to treat a king, and as *dakshina* received a very expensive robe. The large-hearted Jivaka thought that Buddha was the fit person to receive such a valuable gift. So he humbly offered it to Buddha. Being indebted to Jivaka, Buddha could not refuse the gift. But the result was far-reaching. Till then, it was a rule that the bhikkhus should wear only a *kantha* or robe prepared by stitching together rejected pieces of cloth. Buddha was forced to alter this rule and allow monks to wear unstitched, full-length robes.

This was in old times. Now the face of the medical profession has completely changed. These changes have been brought about by three conditions: globalization, technicalization,<sup>1</sup> and commercialization. I shall take up these three briefly.

## Globalization

Like all other aspects of life, medicine has also become globalized. Now, one need not go to the US for advanced, sophisticated surgery. In fact, people are coming to India instead—and that is called medical tourism, because the same consultation, diagnostic procedures, and therapeutic measures can be had here at much lower cost.

There has also been globalization of disease. Aids is a striking recent example. And having accepted the Western lifestyle, Indians are also getting lifestyle diseases. Incidentally, it might be mentioned that the state of health of Americans is not as good as one might imagine. Forty per cent of people in the US are either without or with insufficient health insurance, and medical services are so expensive there that it is nearly impossible to get good health care without health insurance. Together with this there are lifestyle diseases plus serious psychological problems.

In this context I would like to refer to two articles: 'Medicine in an Unjust World,' by M H King, and 'The Diseases of Gods: Some Newer Threats to Health,' by M H King and C M Elliott, appearing in the first and third editions, respectively, of the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*. The first article focuses on the differences and disparity in prevalent disease patterns and available medical services in poor and developing countries on the one hand, and affluent ones, on the other. The article bitterly criticizes the tendency of developing countries to blindly accept the American model of health care and medicine. The disease patterns as well as financial structures of developing countries are different from those of developed countries, and accepting the health-care patterns of the latter in poor countries is bound to produce disparities in health-care

access and also economic imbalance.

Unfortunately this is happening in India today. We have major unsolved community health problems which ought to have been solved twenty years ago. For example, malnutrition is persisting and maternal mortality is as high as it was twenty years ago. Undernourished women beget underweight babies who become stunted children, and two hundred million such children who fail to reach the full potential of their growth belong to India. According to the third National Family Health Survey, nearly half of Indian children are undernourished. India has also the lowest child immunization rates in South Asia.<sup>2</sup>

In the future we are going to have both types of diseases. On the one hand there will be malaria, tuberculosis, Aids, malnutrition, and respiratory and gastro-intestinal disorders, and on the other, lifestyle diseases.

The second article warns against the grave ethical implications of a science-driven industrial economy which treats the global environment as an infinite source of resources and an infinite sink for pollutants; which is destroying the concept of family and traditional community values, and triggering unprecedented population growth. This article, which is significantly included in a prestigious textbook of medicine, also points to the media as a disease agent which relentlessly promotes a high-resource-consuming, excessively polluting lifestyle, encourages violence, and is steadily eroding the norms of traditional sexual behaviour and family stability. The authors also take into consideration the phenomena of global warming and the greenhouse effect. This will lead to changes in the patterns of rain, increase in communicable and vector-borne diseases, and increase in morbidity and mortality from heart disease, stroke, and heat stress in the aged and chronically ill. Perhaps it will also increase the incidence of skin diseases, cancers, and cataracts. We can also expect a high incidence of mental diseases like panic disorders, social phobias, anxiety and depressive disorders, impulsive and behavioural disorders, drug abuse, and schizophrenia.

## Technicalization

Warfare and medicine—these are two spheres in which technology has entered in a very big way. Technology has indeed brought some medical miracles, and today medical science and diagnostic as well as therapeutic technology cannot be divorced. Technology has come to stay. But technology has also robbed clinical medicine of its beauty and art. Earlier eminent physicians used to diagnose cases intuitively—an ability which they had developed through decades of clinical practice. But technology has converted doctors into technicians who set right their patients, and reduced patients to machines gone out of order. The social, economic, and psychological facets of the patients are totally neglected. Many years ago I saw a book entitled *Patients as People*.<sup>3</sup> In it about twenty clinical cases were described, not as a doctor would describe a case history, but in their social setting. I remember just two cases—one of phaeochromocytoma (adrenal-gland tumour) and the other of epilepsy. It described, for example, how someone suddenly falls down on the street, how people gather around him, how he is brought home, how his family members react, and how his financial situation is affected—in the form of a real-life story. Doctors need to remember that the patient is a socio-economic and psychological being and not merely a machine.

Medicine has moved from organism to organ, from organ to cell, and from cell to molecular level. The discovery of the biological role of nucleic acids and the uncovering of the genetic code and its role in regulating life processes are marvellous discoveries of recent years. Medicine has acquired a vast body of knowledge and has become highly technical. It has developed the capability to directly intervene in and manipulate the activities, bodies, and minds of human beings through such techniques as genetic counselling, genetic engineering, prenatal diagnosis of sex and genetic diseases, *in vitro* fertilization, organ transplantation, blood dialysis, artificial joint and heart implantation, psychosurgery, and even (in the near future) cloning. The

data show that modern medicine has entered a new evolutionary stage with the promise of continued improvements in medical capabilities, not only for solving problems of sickness, but perhaps even for enhancing life.

According to K Park, despite spectacular biomedical advances and massive expenditures, death rates and life expectancy in developed countries have remained unchanged.<sup>4</sup> Today, a great scepticism surrounds medical care.<sup>5</sup> Like so many other institutions in contemporary society, medicine has come under heavy fire. Medicine, as practised today, has begun to be questioned and criticized. Some critics have even described modern medicine as a threat to health. Their arguments have been based on certain facts such as these:

- With increased medical costs have not come increased benefits in terms of health.
- Despite spectacular advances in medicine, diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, schistosomiasis, leprosy, filaria, trypanosomiasis, and leishmaniasis have either not lessened or actually increased.
- Life-expectancy has remained low and infant and child mortality rates high in many developing countries, despite advances in medicine.
- Historical epidemiological studies have shown that significant improvement in longevity had been achieved through improved food supplies and sanitation long before the advent of modern drugs and high technology.<sup>6</sup>
- There is no equity in the distribution of health services, resulting in limited access to health care for large segments of the world's population.
- Modern medicine is also attacked for its elitist orientation even in health systems adapted to overcome social disparities.<sup>7</sup>

High-technology medicine seems to be getting out of hand and leading health systems in the wrong direction—that is, away from health promotion for the many and towards expensive treatment for the few. For example, in developing countries, the tendency has been to follow the Western models of medical education and to favour high-cost, low-coverage, elite-oriented health services. Not

only is there an increasing concern about the cost and allocation of health resources, but the efficacy of modern medicine is being fundamentally questioned from various points of view. It has given rise to the notion that limits have been reached on the health impact of medical care and research.<sup>8</sup> This has been labelled as a 'failure of success'.<sup>9</sup>

Technicalization has also undermined the doctor-patient relationship. Sometimes patients are treated as 'guinea pigs'. Patients too have become conscious of the boons of technology and prefer to have the advantage of technology in diagnoses and treatment.

In an article entitled 'Scientific Medicine—success or failure?' in the second edition of the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*, David F Horrobin, after describing the era of success of scientific medicine, comments that there is an astonishing increase in the amount of money spent on research, and an equal increase in cost of medical care, yet these escalating costs have not been accompanied by equivalent objective therapeutic successes or a rise in patient satisfaction. In the Western world, a reaction is building up against modern medicine. Scientific medicine—portrayed as cold, unfeeling, unsympathetic, rigidly concerned with facts, treating the patient as a case with a disease and unappreciative of the person as a whole, neglecting his or her psychological, economic, and social dimensions—has begun to be widely thought of as a villain.

Much of the escalating cost of medicine relates to the introduction of diagnostic tests. When diagnostic tests were few and it seemed that health care budgets were infinitely expandable, the cost of tests did not matter. But now, with the vast range of tests available and a limited purse, diagnostic procedures have great potential for harm simply by drawing money away from areas more directly relevant to patient care.

Another failure of so-called scientific medicine has been its continued introduction and use of procedures which have no value in objective terms. The aim of medicine should be 'to cure sometimes, to relieve often, and to comfort always'.<sup>10</sup> Many mod-



ern medical procedures do not fulfil this criterion. Coronary care units have not been convincingly shown to change the outcome of a heart attack, yet this has not stopped their vast proliferation. Except in restricted indications, coronary bypass surgery has not been shown to be better than conservative treatment, yet this has not stopped the development of a large industry. The list could go on.

The problem with modern medicine, according to Horrobin, is not that it is scientific, but that it is not scientific enough. A truly scientific approach must prevent much of the escalation of medical costs and must focus on curing, relieving, and comforting. To make the results of modern medical technology available at affordable cost to the poor is the challenge before us today, and will be so in the future.

Everything which we introduce into medicine should be measured against this sole criterion: Is the new investigation or diagnostic or therapeutic procedure better for the patient in terms of cure, relief, or comfort? Unfortunately, medical science has been dominated by commercial interests.

It must be remembered that medical science is not simply science, but applied science. Yet it has acquired much of the flavour of a pure science, an academic 'glass bead game', in which knowledge is sought without regard to therapeutic ends. We have generated knowledge without wisdom.

In this context I would like to mention the Grand Challenges in Global Health Initiative, a major effort to achieve scientific breakthroughs against diseases that kill millions of people each year in the world's poorest countries.<sup>11</sup> The ultimate goal of the initiative is to create 'deliverable technologies'—health tools that are not only effective, but also inexpensive to produce, easy to distribute, and simple to use in developing countries. The initiative is supported by a \$450 million commitment from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help apply innovation in science and technology to the greatest health problems of the developing world. Of the billions spent each year on research into life-saving medicines, only a small fraction is spent on

discovering and developing new tools to fight the diseases that cause millions of deaths each year in developing countries. 'It's shocking how little research is directed toward the diseases of the world's poorest countries,' said Bill Gates, co-founder of the foundation.

The first fourteen scientific challenges, selected from among more than one thousand suggestions from scientists and health experts around the world, address the following goals:

- *Developing improved childhood vaccines* that do not require refrigeration, needles, or multiple doses, in order to improve immunization rates in developing countries, where each year twenty-seven million children do not receive basic immunizations.
- *Studying the immune system to guide the development of new vaccines*, including vaccines to prevent malaria, tuberculosis, and Aids, which together kill more than five million people each year.
- *Developing new ways of preventing insects from transmitting diseases*, such as malaria, which infects 350–500 million people every year.
- *Growing more nutritious staple crops to combat malnutrition*, which affects more than two billion people worldwide.
- *Discovering ways to prevent drug resistance*, because many drugs that were once successful at treating diseases like malaria are losing their effectiveness.
- *Discovering methods to treat latent and chronic infections* such as tuberculosis, which nearly a third of the world's population harbour in their bodies.
- *More accurately diagnosing and tracking disease* in poor countries that do not have sophisticated laboratories or reliable medical recordkeeping systems.<sup>12</sup>

### Commercialization

The third factor which has disfigured the face of the medical profession is commercialization. The medical profession is now looked upon not as the noblest profession, but as the most lucrative business. From high capitation fees for admission into medical colleges and exorbitant educational costs,

to commissions for ordering investigations, five-star hospitals, and the pharmaceutical industry with its grip on prescribing doctors, commercialization has penetrated into the profession in various ways and at almost every level. It is a law that the nobler a profession, the more vulnerable it is to degradation; this applies most aptly to the medical profession. It is no wonder that today doctors are mistrusted and looked upon by patients with suspicion, that the profession has come under the Consumer Protection Act, and that various types of malpractices like taking commission for referrals, unwanted investigations and surgery, and sponsorship of medical programmes by pharmaceutical companies have come into vogue.

There is a tendency among doctors to congregate in cities. I have been meeting medicos coming to Chandigarh for entrance examinations for post graduate medical courses. I ask them, 'What will you do if you are not selected?' (and most of them will not be). They invariably say they will try again and again. From what they say it would appear that they have no alternative to going in for specialization and super-specialization. That means they can work only in specialty hospitals. I try to impress upon them through various examples that even with an MBBS degree they can do a lot of good work. Millions of poor Indians cannot get even the services of an MBBS doctor.

Thus, the medical profession is facing great challenges. Doctors cannot keep their eyes closed to socio-economic and even political issues—as is evident from the recent government policy on reservations. One of the major challenges is to carry the results of modern research and technology to the doorstep of the poorest of the poor. In spite of all these problems and challenges, the medical profession continues to be one of the noblest ones. There are exemplary doctors today who testify that the profession is indeed noble. Let me conclude by quoting from the preface of the first edition of *Harrison's Textbook of Medicine*:

No greater opportunity, responsibility, or obligation can fall to the lot of a human being than

to become a physician. In the care of the suffering he needs technical skill, scientific knowledge, and human understanding. He who uses these with courage, with humility, and with wisdom will provide a unique service for his fellow man, and will build an enduring edifice of character within himself. The physician should ask of his destiny no more than this; he should be content with no less.<sup>13</sup>

It now depends upon doctors to resurrect the image of the profession and reclaim its lost glory. ☞

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मैत्री कारुण्यमार्तेषु शक्ये प्रीतिरुपेक्षणम् ।  
प्रकृतिस्थेषु भूतेषु वैद्यवृत्तिश्चतुर्विधा ॥

Friendliness (towards all), compassion towards the sick, active interest in (curing) treatable patients, and a detached outlook towards the incurable—these are the four mental dispositions (expected) of a physician.

—Charaka Samhita, 'Sutra Sthana', 9.26

# Rethinking Medicine

Prof. B M Hegde

No great discovery was ever made in science except by one who lifted his nose above the grindstone of details and ventured on a more comprehensive vision. —*Albert Einstein*

I WONDER, at times, if we have lost our sense of direction in modern medicine, relying solely on reductionism in facing real-life situations. We have enough evidence to show that reductionist logic does not work in any dynamic system, least of all in the human being, who is much more than the sum of the organs that we are ‘trying to fix’. Each time we feel that some ‘things’ have gone wrong with the human organs, we try and ‘do’ something, until the patient gets better or dies. Death of a patient makes us feel, for a while, that we might be inadequate, possibly fallible, and could be wrong in our whole approach of curing; that we should have been healing, instead. The essence of medical teaching these days seems to lie in a ‘do it’ and ‘fix it’ attitude. Deep down, this is driven by the technological onslaught upon this humane calling, the art of healing.

### Knowing That We Know Not

Henry Thoreau has defined art as ‘that which makes a man’s day’. The art of healing is that which makes the patient’s day. The doctor-patient relationship is akin to any other interpersonal relationship, not unlike, say, the mother-child or husband-wife relationship. What does that mean in practical terms? Every person possesses an innate capacity for human interactions, a capacity that shapes one’s personality. In every doctor there is a wounded patient and a healer, as there is in every patient an innate capacity to be a healer as well as a wounded sufferer. This is an ancient mythological concept. In Indian mythology, Sitala is both the giver and healer of smallpox. In Babylon, there was the goddess of

dogs with two names: ‘as Gula she was death, and as Labartu a healer’.

Unfortunately, modern medicine rarely takes serious note of the healer in the patient, adopting mostly a paternalistic attitude—to cure—which many a time fails to work or even works against the patient. Iatrogenic diseases are a case in point. The greatest discovery of the twentieth century has been the discovery of human ignorance. However, this does not seem to have percolated into reductionist science and medicine in a significant way. The word ‘doctor’ is derived from the Latin *docere*, meaning ‘to teach’. A good teacher is one ‘who knows not, and knows he knows not’. Curiosity should compel the teacher to ponder over the unknown, together with the students. Helping students to deliver goods is a great quality. Education, after all, is derived from the Latin *educere*, ‘to bring out (the baby)’. It is the student who ultimately has to bring out the child. On the same analogy, it is the patient who has to heal himself, awakening his ‘inner doctor’, the immune system.

Lewis Thomas, a former president of the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute in New York, once wrote: ‘Instead of always emphasizing what we actually know in science, it would be enormously fruitful to focus alternatively on what we do not know. For it is here that the wonders lie. To know is the domain that is safe, where risk-taking is no longer necessary. To dwell in it forever is not only to never advance, it is also to promote a deceptive and false view of ourselves as knowing more than we do—of being more powerful than we really are.’

Thomas has clearly diagnosed the cancer that is eating into modern medicine with its reductionist scientific basis. The latter, however, is gradually dying a natural death, weighed down by specializa-

tion and sub-specialization. In the distant horizon a new sun is rising—chaos theory and non-linear mathematics. We cannot remain oblivious to these developments, for medicine controls the lives of millions of people who are ill, or imagine they are ill, at any given time. We need a new philosophy of holism, in the true sense of the word, in medicine.

If one looks at the growth of humans, one notices a continuous transformation of the human intellect from the 'me' concept of our cave-dwelling forebears to the 'other than me' reality of present times. Marching along this continuum, humans have grown from the 'single me' stage to groups, villages, cities, and nations; and now we are expanding across the universe! I am happy that it is Indian thought that has always been ahead of others in this field. The Vedic wisdom of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world is but one family) shows that our ancestors could clearly think much ahead of their times. We urgently need such visionaries, who dare to lift medicine from the bottomless pit—dug by technology, money, and business—into which it has sunk!

### **The 'How' and 'Why' of Illness**

Why does one get any disease at all? This is a million-dollar question. When Charles Sherrington was appointed professor of physiology at Liverpool University in 1899, he said in his acceptance speech: 'The question "why" can never be answered by positive science. The latter can, at best, answer the question "how" or "how much" but never the question "why". A physiologist could say how the heart contracts, but never say why the heart contracts; he could define death, but will never be able to define life.'

The question 'why' can only be answered in teleology, never in biology. So let us look at the question from the teleological perspective. 'Universal consciousness' would want this world to go on uninterrupted, or at least, without much damage to its components. To achieve this, bad people, who could be a nuisance to society, will eventually have to be eliminated, or at least immobilized, to

avoid unnecessary trouble for the good people in the world. People who are angry, jealous, proud, hostile, and greedy are a menace to society. Recent studies have shown every one of the above devils to be an important risk factor for all the dangerous and fatal degenerative illnesses. Dawson Churchill writes: 'From the global perspective it may be very valuable that such an individual be unhealthy. This limits his scope for working mischief! If he were well, his ability to project these destructive emotions into disruptive action would be enhanced. Illness may thus be something of a planetary defense mechanism, a reaction against baneful inner states which human beings have nurtured within themselves.' Although I do not agree with his views *in toto*, they do appear very logical and holistic. This is in fact the global wellness concept that I have been developing over the years. Nothing in this universe could be viewed in isolation. This concept tries to marry biology to teleology, answering both the questions 'why' and 'how'.

### **Whither Modern Medicine?**

On one side is the enormous 'progress' we have made in the field of medical technology. We live in an age of heart transplants, artificial hearts and kidneys, genetic engineering, and even cloning. We daily wage surgical and chemical warfare on diseases, and the bills for these keep skyrocketing. Star performers in this field attract all the limelight; and the price tags for medical and surgical procedures keep growing apace with the charges of the star performers. In an editorial in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, H Krumholtz, a leading cardiologist at Yale University, wrote about the flourishing business in one of the most expensive of surgical interventions, coronary artery bypass surgery. Krumholtz felt that bypass surgery is done more often to fill the coffers of hospitals and surgeons rather than to help patients. Many studies in this field are being manipulated, using all sorts of statistical devices, to show benefit to patients, while in truth, the procedures are only helping the doctors and the industry. Corporate business houses are jumping into the arena of



'hospital industry' in the fond hope of making large profits without the headache of trouble from labour unions or raw material suppliers. This goes against all canons of medical ethics, if there are any left. Hippocrates cautioned: 'Never try to make money in the sick room.' Did he mean that doctors should offer free service? Far from it. What he meant was that medicine is a noble calling and should never be debased to that of a money-making business.

Running parallel to this development is the burgeoning undercurrent of mistrust and loss of faith in the medical profession, as evidenced by the increasing number of lawsuits against doctors in the West. Sadly, this phenomenon has appeared in India as well. This distrust of doctors would make medicine very expensive, as every doctor, under all circumstances, would want to use every available technological aid to allay his or her own anxiety and protect him- or herself against future threat of legal action. This is where we stand today.

Given this background, it is time for us to have a re-look at what we are doing in modern medicine, based as it is on Newtonian physics and linear mathematics. With Einstein's theories of relativity and the developments in quantum physics, scientific views about space, time, energy, and matter started coming nearer to the ancient wisdom of the East, which looks at this world, including the observer's consciousness, as a whole. Heisenberg's uncertainty principle brought modern science very close to Acharya Shankara's philosophy of the inscrutable nature of matter, energy, and maya. Modern medicine—presently driven by technological and market forces—has to change course to keep pace with human wisdom that is slowly leading us towards the ultimate Truth. 'Modern medicine,' Prince Charles observed, 'with all its breathtaking progress, is like the Tower of Pisa, slightly off balance.' I could not agree more! Doctors, like people in other walks of life, surely need to abide by their *swadharma*, societal obligations.

### **Philosophy of Ayurveda**

Ayurveda, the science of life, is part of the ageless

Vedic heritage of India. Speculations about its origin take us back several millennia before the Common Era. The extensive literature on this subject has one common emphasis—that the essence of Ayurveda is to preserve good health, which is every human being's birthright. Ayurveda prescribes lifestyle changes, with emphasis on tranquillity of mind derived from universal compassion, as an insurance against the occasional illness. In this system, disease is only an accident. Just as road accidents are rare if one follows traffic rules, disease would be an exception if one followed the lifestyle prescribed in Ayurveda, which is not hard to do.

The human body has a powerful inbuilt immune system that could correct most, if not all, ills that we are heir to. In the unlikely event of this mechanism failing, and only then, should doctors interfere; and that too to help the system when possible. In fact, the concept of immune deficiency syndromes had been developed in ancient India. Methods of boosting body immunity are the mainstay of Ayurvedic therapeutics; the *pancha-karmas*—detoxification through controlled use of emesis, purgation, sweating, and other such methods—form one such technique.

### **Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshitavya**

This motto—keep the well healthy—can be a great help to modern medicine where, with the available array of scopes and scanners, coupled with our inability to define normality precisely, we have ended up having no normal healthy human beings at all. Among the many methods of preserving health in Ayurveda, the discipline of yoga as expounded by Patanjali is of central importance. Unlike what is being sold as yoga by the New Age gurus, original yoga has eight limbs. It includes rules for day-to-day living (including diet), the art and ethics of living, regulation of breath (*pranayama*), detached outlook towards life, yogic postures for ease of practising the next steps of *dharana* (concentration) and *dhyana* (meditation), and the ultimate realization of the impermanence of life (and the immortality of Consciousness) to make us fearless even in the

face of death. Thus defined, yoga becomes a way of life and is not confined to just a few contortions of the body for an hour or so daily.

Another distinctive feature of the philosophy of Ayurveda is the concept that every disease begins in our thoughts (consciousness) and grows in the body. In addition, genetic contributions are very clearly understood. The concept is holistic and not reductionist. Humans are part of the universal Consciousness; the environment, and even the stars, are supposed to have a role in human health. In contrast, modern medicine has only started grappling with the role played by the mind in serious illnesses. Quantum physics does seem to be going into the realm of human consciousness. Moreover, recent studies of patients revived after cardiac arrest or those undergoing brain surgeries, and also the findings of molecular biology, point to the possibility of human consciousness (mind) extending beyond the brain into every single human cell. This pervasiveness of consciousness has been the hallmark of Ayurvedic thinking.

### **Efficacy of Ayurveda**

In the absence of recognition for Ayurveda in mainstream science journals, Ayurvedic researchers find it very difficult to get their studies published. But there have been modern scientific enquiries into the effects of yogic breathing. Millions all over the world now practise controlled breathing for good health. Unfortunately, this has become another big business with all the trappings of the market. Recent evidence also suggests that the mind can influence cardiac rhythm and also arrhythmias.

Smallpox, the only scourge that we have been able to conquer so far, was eradicated through vaccination. The authentication for Edward Jenner's anecdotal experience with vaccination came from the studies of a London physician, T Z Holwell. Holwell had studied the Indian system of vaccination for twenty long years in the Bengal province of the Raj, and had reported his findings to the president and fellows of London College in 1747. The graphic descriptions of the Indian method and

its efficacy are portrayed in his paper, which can be viewed in the archives of the college library even today. Although slightly damaged, the document providentially survived the great London fire of the eighteenth century and is a testimony to the original method of vaccination that eventually led to the eradication of this greatest scourge of humankind.

### **Personality Types in Ayurveda**

Ayurveda classifies human beings into three distinct types—*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*—and multiple subtypes. This typing takes into account the phenotypic (physical) and genotypic features, in addition to features pertaining to mind and consciousness. In short, it is a holistic concept, unlike the modern medical method of matching groups for controlled studies on the basis of a few phenotypic features like age, sex, height, weight, and body mass index, along with some biochemical measures. An Ayurvedic physician classifies his or her patients based on these types, since Ayurvedic treatment is individualistic and not based on controlled studies as modern medicine is. Each patient needs individual titration of the methods used for him or her. As the evolution of a dynamic system depends on the initial state of the system, future controlled studies could use these personality types to match cohorts for better results. Computerized systems to classify people based on this system have now been developed.

### **Ayurvedic Holism**

Most of the so-called Ayurvedic drugs currently marketed are 'reductionist', that is, they contain only extracts of the active principle in plants to conform to modern pharmacological standards. *Dravyaguna*, Ayurvedic pharmacodynamics, does not deal with active principles. It deals with the properties of whole plant extracts as recorded in ancient texts. This is supposed to take into effect even photo-dynamicity (effect of sunlight on plant products). Some plants are to be harvested only after sunset lest their properties should change if harvested while the sun is up. Modern medicine now tells us that extracts might have serious side

effects in the long run. Vitamin C in large doses, over long periods, could encourage cancer growth in the body, but eating tomato—with lots of vitamin C in it—daily would not harm the body. There are many unknown chemicals in the whole plant that prevent the active ingredient from harming the patient while, at the same time, potentiating the positive effects of the active principle. We do need to standardize drug delivery methods to conform to modern standards, but holism should remain the basis. In fact, herbal medicines are the least important part of Ayurvedic therapeutics. Yoga, *panchakarma*, and surgery are the mainstay. Ayurvedic surgery was so advanced in ancient India that the method of rhinoplasty (repair of damaged or deformed noses) used by the Ayurvedic physician Shushruta is still being used by plastic surgeons. Shushruta's classes in anatomy for students lasted more than two years, and he had devised many important emergency surgeries.

### A Fresh Approach to Health Care Delivery

Given the greater role Ayurvedic doctors are coming to play in the health services in India, it is important that they know clearly their job specifications. In an integrated system, the Ayurvedic physician's job would be to study his or her patients in great detail, with special reference to their personality and environment, and classify them accurately. Management strategies could then be suitably tailored. Most patients would need *panchakarma* methods. Almost all of them would do well with the lifestyle changes that Ayurveda prescribes with special emphasis on diet, yoga, and exercise. Rarely would drugs or surgical methods be appropriate in a community setting. With advances in modern science and technology, one cannot ignore the benefits of using modern high-tech methods for emergency care. This would require the conventional Ayurvedic doctor to have a reasonably good knowledge of modern medical methods in order to be able to give proper advice to patients. A judicious combination of modern medicine and Ayurveda would be an ideal training for a family doctor. More skilled specialists in

श्रुते पर्यवदातत्वं बहुशो दृष्टकर्मता ।  
दाक्ष्यं शौचमिति ज्ञेयं वैद्ये गुणचतुष्टयम् ॥

Thorough knowledge of the (medical) sciences, extensive experience in (medical) activities, industry, and integrity—these are the four qualities of a physician.  
—Charaka Samhita, 'Sutra Sthana', 9.6

either system could be part of a referral system. This would bring down the cost of top-heavy modern medical care considerably.

More than eighty per cent of illnesses are either minor or self-correcting. They could easily be helped using Ayurvedic methods and supportive therapy. In addition, Ayurveda could help manage chronic debilitating diseases at reasonable cost. Specialized modern medical care is mandatory for only about ten per cent of all ailments. The cost of caring for the other ninety per cent could be considerably reduced without detriment to public health by using Ayurvedic health-promotion methods. More important, many iatrogenic problems could thus be avoided. Iatrogenic problems constitute fifteen per cent of all hospital admissions.

It would however be naive to assume that Ayurveda is the panacea for all our health problems. Moreover, medical practitioners unfamiliar with the way Ayurveda works could be baffled when confronted with patients advised wrongly by poorly trained Ayurvedic practitioners. The whole gamut of such intricacies will have to be worked out before changing the system of medical education into a complementary holistic system.

Ayurveda would not be of much use in emergencies, where modern medical methods must needs be followed. But for chronic degenerative diseases and ageing problems, Ayurveda is an excellent alternative. The costs of therapy are also comparatively less. Modern medical drugs and interventions are good for acute emergencies, but in the long run most of them run into serious problems. It may be time for a fresh approach to health delivery. For as Charles Beard has said, 'When it is dark enough, you can see the stars.'



# Vanaprastha Ashrama for the Present Age

Dr Pratima D Desai

IN ancient India, a person's activities were harmoniously regulated according to his or her stage of life. Each stage had its own dharma, or duties, to be undertaken. These stages, called ashramas, were four in number—Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Sannyasa—and were to be strictly followed. The ashrama system was fundamental to maintaining discipline, peace, and harmony in the family and society. In family as well as social and public arenas, virtuous living, guided by noble character, high values, and a sense of duty, was the norm, resulting in all-round happiness, peace, and harmony. But with the passage of time, the meaning, interpretation, and practical application of the ashrama system changed, and gradually the whole system fell into disuse.

## The Ashrama System

The guidelines for an ideal *arya-jivana*, or life of an Arya, have been delineated in *Manu Samhita*, Bhṛigu's codification in verse of rules laid down by the ancient Indian lawgiver Manu. Manu clearly explains the significance of and duties pertaining to the four ashramas. Though Manu and the *Manu Samhita* have not escaped modern controversy, still, his work is a foundational Dharmashastra, and forms the basis of Hindu law even today. The four ashramas are described below.

- The Brahmacharya Ashrama was meant for the all-round development of the child, including formal, informal, and secular education. One was to receive training in various areas to enable one to stand on one's own feet in later life. Ethics and values were imbibed in each and every area of learning. Manu set forth the many basic traits which were to be developed from student days. For example, the

following two shlokas from *Manu Samhita* illustrate the most important virtues to be developed in young age:

*Indriyāṇām vicaratām viṣayeṣvapahāriṣu;*

*Samyame yatnam-ātiṣṭhed-vidvān-yanteva vājinām.*

The wise person (brahmacharin) should strive to restrain his senses which run wild among alluring sense objects, just as a charioteer controls his horses (2.88).

*Vaśe kṛtvendriyagrāmam samyamya ca manastathā;*

*Sarvān-saṁsādhayed-arthān-akṣiṇvan-yogatastanum.*

Having subdued the (ten) organs and controlled the mind, one (the brahmacharin) should achieve all one's aims without weakening the body through yoga (excessive austerity) (2.100).

- In the Grihastha Ashrama, the householder was to discharge all his duties and debts according to dharma. Artha, wealth, was to be obtained for satisfying kama, desire, but only in a righteous manner, according to dharma. Enjoying worldly life, earning money, having children, taking care of the family and its welfare, and performing various duties required by family and society: these belong to this stage of life. Manu called the Grihastha Ashrama the key to the other three:

*Yathā vāyur samāśritya vartante sarvajantavaḥ;*

*Tathā grhastham-āśritya vartante sarva āśramāḥ.*

As all creatures depend on air for life, in the same way (the members of) all ashramas subsist on the support of the grihastha (3.77).

It is important to note here that if a grihastha does not live in the prescribed way, the other three ashramas are affected. Manu continues:

*Yamān-seveta satatam na nityam niyamānbudhaḥ;*

*Yamān-pataty-akūrvāṇo-niyamān-kevalān-bhajan.*

A wise man should constantly discharge the paramount duties (called yama), but not always the



minor ones (called *niyama*); for he who does not discharge the former, while he obeys the latter alone, (surely) falls (4.204).

In other words, first the *yamas*, then the *niyamas*. What are they? These shlokas explain:

*Ārśaṁsyaṁ kṣamā satyam-ahimsā damam-asprhā;  
Dhāyānam prasādo mādhyam-ārjavam ca yamā daśa.*

Mercy, forgiveness, truth, non-violence, control over the senses, non-attachment, concentration, joyousness, sweetness, and straightforwardness are the ten *yamas*.

*Saucam-ijyā-tapo-dānam svādhyāyopasthanigrahaḥ;  
Vratopavāsau maunam ca snānam ca niyamā daśa.*

Purity, sacrifice, austerity, charity, study, chastity, pious observances, fasting, control of speech, and bathing are the ten *niyamas*.

- The Vanaprastha Ashrama was to be entered into when one's children were grown-up, one's household duties completed, and one's family well-settled. One was to hand the household over to one's successor, leave the worldly life and all its luxuries and enjoyments, and go to the *vana*, the forest, to lead a sattvic, godward life in solitude. The *Manu Samhita* says:

*Grhasthastu yadā paśyed-vali-palitam-ātmanah;  
Apatyasyaiva cāpatyaṁ tadāranyaṁ samāśrayet.*

When a householder gets to see wrinkles on his body, white hair on his head, and his grandchildren, he should resort to the forest (6.2).

*Svādhyāye nityayuktah syād-dānto maitraḥ samāhitah;  
Dātā nityam-anādātā sarvabhūtānukampakah.*

He should be engaged in regular study, control his senses, keep friendly behaviour with everyone, and have a tranquil mind. He must always give in charity, not accept gifts from others, and have mercy on all living beings (6.8).

- The Sannyasa Ashrama was the final stage of life, in which one was to give up everything and strive solely for liberation through intense sadhana. The aim was to reach the final goal of human life, moksha or liberation from samsara—or God-realization.

*Vaneṣu tu vihr̥tyaivam tr̥tīyaṁ bhāgam-āyusaḥ;  
Caturtham-āyuso bhāgam tyaktvā saṅgān-parivrajat.*

After spending the third portion of one's life in the forest, the fourth portion of life should be spent as a sannyasin, renouncing all attachment (for the world) (6.33).

*Adhyātma-ratir-āsīno nirapekṣo nir-āmiṣaḥ;  
Ātmanaiva sahāyena sukhārthi vicared-ihā.*

Delighting in meditation on the Supreme, independent of others, giving up all desires, with only the Self as companion, seeking supreme bliss, shall (the sannyasin) live (6.49).

At the present time, these ideals as given by Manu are not practical or applicable *in toto*. However, they embody certain basic truths and values which are not only applicable but also very much wanted to re-establish the glory of India.

### Current State of the Elderly

Nowadays, most people live a very hectic life. Their lifestyle, priorities, need for luxury and enjoyment, and often, lack of values, leave no room for the concept of ashramas. Some strive for great wealth, name, and fame. The majority, perhaps, are just trying to earn their bread, trying to live the best possible life. And there are many unfortunate people whose condition is so miserable that they cannot think beyond having two meals per day. For these last, the four ashramas have absolutely no meaning at all.

When those who have striven for wealth, name, and fame, and those who have lived a life of relative comfort, retire from active life, they—some of them at least—feel an emptiness. Their worldly achievements no longer seem attractive. They feel a strong craving for peace and true joy. Most of these people have enjoyed enough worldly life, social life, and public life; they have fulfilled their duties towards family and society. However, they feel an emptiness within.

How do they address this emptiness? Those having spiritual aspiration from their youth may try to get involved in activities with their chosen organization, where their spiritual quest can flourish. When such activities are performed without attachment, the aspirant will gain true joy and fulfilment.

Some try to use their knowledge and experience in activities benefiting society at large, without seeking personal gain. Such selfless work will give them inner joy and fulfilment. Those who are well-to-do, having adequate finances and shelter and good health, have the freedom to live their life in their own way, and may try to find joy and peace by engaging themselves in activities of their choice, like travelling, socializing with their friends, or spending occasional quality time in solitude. Such people will also find inner joy and fulfilment. Yet others will choose to spend lots of time in reading, writing, researching, creating new things, painting, music, dancing, and other art-related activities, and find joy and fulfilment in those things.

There are many families in which the retired members are well-respected, well-treated, and very lovingly taken care of as long as they live. Such families have strong family bonds. Moreover, their family legacy is carried forward from generation to generation. In such cases there is nothing to worry about.

But the avenues of expression and seeking fulfilment we have mentioned are not available to all; a large number of people are stymied in their search for inner joy and happiness in their retired life. A typical family set-up, which has naturally many distractions, makes such a search difficult. Again, many may be unable to live in solitude because of poor health, financial constraints, or the fear of social stigma. Most elderly people are dependant upon others—either children or someone close. Very few people have the freedom and provisions to live independently in their own way. Even if they do, it may not be safe for them to do so. Elderly persons living alone are easy targets for criminals, and cases of such people being robbed and even murdered in their own homes are increasing, particularly in the metropolises.

Under such circumstances, most elderly people compromise with the conditions they are confronted with. Some end up living in old-age homes; some with severe health problems are kept in nursing homes. Again, there are old people who are so

much attached to their family life—even in old age—that they cannot imagine living in any other way but with the family. Some are attached to their wealth; some are attached to their children and grandchildren. Even if there are problems and an unhappy environment in the family, they try to adjust, and try to feel contented living in the same old ruts. Nobody can help such people suffering and living an unhappy life. This is certainly not the way to live in one's old age!

### ***Seeking Solutions***

What is the reason for the poor living conditions of elderly people in Indian society at large? Are we under the strong influence of Western culture—where parents are often remembered only on special days like Mother's and Father's Day and birthdays! Have we totally forgotten our culture? Have we failed to raise our children properly? Have we failed to be effective role models for our children?

There are many reasons, some legitimate and some not. Primary among them is that the first two ashramas of life, Brahmacharya and Grihastha, are not followed properly in today's society. Without the strong foundation of the first two ashramas, we cannot expect the second two to be healthy, as in days of yore. Though at present it is neither possible nor practical to go back, as it were, to the ancient ashrama system, we can make efforts to bring the ashrama system into modern society, adapting it to suit, in the best possible way, the present generation.

With globalization, the thinking, lifestyles, value systems, and culture of Indians are in transition—as they are for almost all nations. However, Indians have inherited certain basic values which will protect them from succumbing fully and irreversibly to Western culture. Many institutions, ashramas, and gurukulas have been established and are working for positive change, working towards making ethical, disciplined, intelligent, goal-oriented, and value-holding citizens for tomorrow. The results of these efforts will be seen in the next twenty to twenty-five years, and at first in small numbers. Efforts in

this direction must be increased and strengthened, to prepare the youth to be enlightened citizens of India. Time will reveal the impact of these efforts.

### **Community-living for the Elderly**

What can be done today? The quandary here is of a large number of people seeking a happy, peaceful, and enjoyable life of their choice in old age. Old-age homes and nursing homes are not the right places for such people. What is the right place? One 'right place' can be found in the concept of 'community living for the elderly'. In old-age homes, the residents are just passing their time, living monotonous lives in loneliness, without any aspiration or enthusiasm, and simply waiting for death. 'Community-living for the elderly' has a wholly different set-up. It provides all facilities for leading a fulfilling retired life: basic necessities like housing, food, water, electricity, health care, and security, and extras like housekeeping, a library, walking-cum-jogging trails, a gymnasium, a yoga centre, indoor-outdoor games, and an entertainment centre. It can also provide special cells or cubicles for people interested in solitude and meditation. Everything is available in the same campus or complex. Relatives, friends, and well-wishers can come to visit, if they wish, at prescribed times. The residents can also go to visit their loved ones, if they so desire. This type of community living can provide a hassle-free, safe, enjoyable life to elderly people, without their becoming a burden or liability to anybody. They can live with self-respect and spend their time in their own way. They might get involved in any indoor-outdoor activity of their choice, or just relax, read, meditate, and spend more time in spiritual pursuits. They can find like-minded people in the same complex with whom they can share their pleasure and pain, and their activities. Most important is that their safety is ensured. In such a complex, the residents have their private lives, with the benefits of group living, and full security.

Looking to the practical side, there can be different categories and options within such a complex, tailored to meet people of varying financial

resources and desired lifestyles. Just as people make provisions for their retired life ahead of time, they may start saving for the community living of their choice from a young age. When they reach retirement age, they do not have to worry about resources. Nobody knows about tomorrow, so it is wise to think ahead of time.

This whole concept sounds Utopian at first—but it is not so. Plans for implementing 'community living for the elderly' are under serious consideration in Australia and some European countries, where they are expecting a heavy rise in the population of elderly people in the coming decade. The baby boom generation of 1940s and 50s will soon become senior citizens. These countries are planning the welfare of their retired people quite ahead of time. Of course, in India the situation is exactly the other way round at present: the major portion of our country's population in the coming years will be young people. However, the needs and welfare of the present generation of elderly people in India must be seriously addressed. If this concept can be successfully worked out now, it will help the country when the young generation of today reaches that stage. Such plans should be worked out well in advance, thus benefiting the present generation of elderly people as well serving the cause of future generations.

Now, who will implement this is the million-dollar question. But: 'Where there's a will, there's a way.' There are many ways to materialize the plan. The government, social work agencies, non-governmental organizations, or even dedicated individuals can investigate and analyse this concept, and endeavour to make it possible and practical. Nothing is impossible if there is a strong will. A recent news item reported a proposal to build such a complex for non-resident Indians (NRIs)! So why not for resident Indians? This is a need of the hour. 'Community living for the elderly' is an idea whose time has come. It will become the Vanaprastha Ashrama for many people in the present age. The sooner it can materialize, the better—for the present as well as future generations.



# Ahimsa and Hinduism

A P N Pankaj

**A**HIMSA, as it is generally understood, means non-violence, non-injury, or harmlessness. While the prefix *a* conveys negation, the term *himsā* is derived from the verbal root *hims*, which is itself obtained from the root *han*, to kill. Scholars of Sanskrit would appreciate that being the desiderative form (*sannanta*) of *han*, *hims* is an expression of intent or motive or desire. Thus *himsā* happens even when there is an intent or desire to harm, hurt, injure, or violate. Ahimsa therefore means abstention from violence, not just physically, but also mentally and verbally.

Ahimsa occupies a prominent position among the various *yamas*, the great moral rules or disciplines. While according to Patanjali, ahimsa is the first among five *yamas*, Jaynavalkya and Atri mention it among ten such disciplines in their respective Smritis.<sup>1</sup> Patanjali emphasizes that these *yamas* are basic rules and ought to be practised universally, irrespective of time, place, purpose, or caste rules.<sup>2</sup> He also speaks of *himsā* (and other obstacles to yoga) as *kṛita* (committed), *kārita* (indirectly caused), or *anumodita* (approved), each in turn being motivated by greed, anger, or self-interest, which never cease to result in pain and ignorance (2.34).

## Vedas, Puranas, Mahabharata

A question is often asked as to the stand taken by the Vedas on the subject of ahimsa, since they are the first, foremost, and final authority on Hinduism. There is a whole range of scholars, including some of the great orthodox acharyas, who argue that many Vedic yajnas could not be performed without animal sacrifice. To support this view, several mantras are quoted by them. It is even suggested that *bali* (sacrificial offering) of animals was an integral part of Vedic yajnas and consequently the term *bali* has come to mean animal or even human

sacrifice in ritual settings.

There is another school of thought which strongly refutes this view. Swami Ramakrishnananda (Shashi Maharaj) says, 'Sometimes in the past the sacrificial priests and performers of Yajnas fell victims to sense-indulgence. The responsibility of carrying on the Yajnas being in their hands, they invented, in order to surfeit their stomachs and indulge their senses, various violent sacrifices marked by use of wine and flesh and propagated them as sanctioned by the Vedas.'<sup>3</sup> '*Mā himsyād sarvabhūtāni*; do not injure any being' is a general dictum associated with the Vedas. The Mahabharata declares ahimsa as the highest dharma (*ahimsā paramo dharmah*), explicitly forbidding killing or violence, and there are several mantras to that effect.<sup>4</sup> In a Vedic funeral hymn, the rishi says: 'I send to a distance the fire that consumes flesh. Carrying the burden of sin, may it go to the house of Yama (death). But let this other fire Jatavedas carry oblations to the gods, for he is well acquainted with all of them.'<sup>5</sup> This may actually underline a more general attitude of ahimsa in the context of yajnas.

As to the various Vedic statements prima facie advocating killing, it has been held that the meanings of such statements or words have to be understood in the light of their contextual, intended, or even metaphysical purport. The *Mimamsa Sutra* even explicitly forbids killing in yajnas.<sup>6</sup> Words like *paśu* (animal), *dhenu* (cow), and *vatsa* (calf) have no doubt been used in the Vedas in the context of yajnas, but elsewhere, their metaphoric meaning has also been given: 'The black portion of the rice is meat and the red one is blood', 'Paddy is the cow and sesame the calf', and so on.<sup>7</sup> Even the ancient names like *adhvara* (where there is no *dhvara* or violence) and *yajña* (the root *yaja* refers to collective worship or offering) clearly suggest the absence

of violence. When the *Isha Upanishad* enjoins, ‘*mā gṛdhaḥ kasyasviddhanam*’ (do not covet what belongs to others), the implicit emphasis is on desisting from mental violence caused by greed.<sup>8</sup>

In the Mahabharata, Maharshi Markandeya says: ‘O king, be compassionate to all beings, be favourable, loving, and free of spite—protecting one’s subjects like one’s own children. Follow the path of righteousness, keep away from unrighteousness, and worship the gods and the manes.’<sup>9</sup> The implicit message in these lines is that the ruler should observe mental and physical ahimsa even as he performs his duties towards his subjects. The Mahabharata also says that ‘violence (*himsā*) is the strength of the wicked (*asādhūnām*) and the tenets of law (*daṇḍavidhi*) the strength of kings’ (5.34.72).

Practically all Puranas extol ahimsa as an important element of dharma or sadhana. In the Bhagavata, the most celebrated Purana, ahimsa has been recommended time and again as one of the characteristics of yoga, or dharma, or even as a general principle to be observed in life.<sup>10</sup> The same Purana mentions that anger and violence (*krodha* and *himsā*) are children of greed and dishonesty (*lobha* and *nikṛti*), who in turn are born of deceit and illusion (*dambha* and *māyā*). This line of Prajapati’s progeny suggests *himsā* of different forms and levels—physical, verbal, and mental. It is also worth noting that an incestuous relationship exists between each of these pairs (4.8.2–3).

### **Manu Smriti, Gita, Ramayana**

In the *Manu Smriti*, an important and controversial Dharmashastra, there are several verses which lay emphasis on ahimsa. At the same time, there are statements that hold violence not contrary to Vedic injunctions as permissible. In other words, it supports the dictum, ‘*vaidikī himsā himsā na bhavati*; the violence sanctioned by the Vedas is no violence.’ There are also passages which clearly support meat-eating, hunting, and killing. According to the advocates of ahimsa, all such passages are subsequent interpolations. It is also generally believed that *Manu Smriti* is not authored by Manu

himself but by someone who, considering Manu to be the ultimate authority, has cited the views of various predecessors and contemporaries of Manu and then established Manu as the final word in each case. From the view point of ahimsa, however, the following passages are worth noting:

‘Ahimsa, truth, non-stealing, purity, and control over senses—these, Manu says, are the common dharmas for the four *varnas*, in brief.’<sup>11</sup>

‘He who kills the non-violent (innocent) beings for his enjoyment, cannot attain happiness and progress in life or in death. One who does not wish to trouble beings by fettering or killing them, who wishes everyone well, achieves lasting happiness. He who does not harm anyone attains without much effort whatever he thinks, (the fruit of) whatever action he undertakes, and whosoever he meditates upon’ (5.45–7). ‘By not injuring any creatures, by detaching the senses (from objects of enjoyment), by the rites prescribed in the Veda, and by rigorously practising austerities, one attains that (Supreme) state here itself’ (6.75).

The Bhagavadgita, the crest-jewel of Hindu dharma, commends ahimsa as one of the most important attributes of sadhana. In his commentary on the Gita, Sri Ramanujacharya defines ahimsa as ‘*paraduḥkṛhāhetutvam*; not being the cause of misery for others’, and ‘*vānmanahkāyāih parapiḍārahitatvam*; not causing pain to others through one’s speech, thought, or actions.’<sup>12</sup> In describing the distinction between *jñāna* (knowledge) and *ajñāna* (ignorance), Sri Krishna counts ahimsa as one of the characteristics of jnana.<sup>13</sup> He also mentions it as one of the divine traits, *daivī-sampad* (16.3).

While enumerating various forms of austerity (tapas), the Gita describes ahimsa, brahmacharya (continence), and service as physical tapas; utterances that are inoffensive, truthful, pleasant, and beneficial as austerity of speech, and serenity of mind, gentleness, silence, and self-control as austerity of mind (17.14–16). These three categories are no different from the physical, verbal, and mental non-violence discussed earlier. It is not without reason, therefore, that Mahatma Gandhi considered ahim-

sa, truth, and brahmacharya to be closely related.

The birth of the Ramayana—the first great epic in Sanskrit, the *ādi-kāvya*—followed the heart-rending killing of one of a pair of curlews by a hunter. Witnessing this, Valmiki's heart melted with compassion and his *śoka* (grief) found expression in *śloka* (verse): *śokaḥ ślokatvamāgataḥ*.<sup>14</sup> Thus the Ramayana was born. The subsequent narrators of the Rama saga in Sanskrit and other Indian and foreign languages, whose number is legion, have also extolled ahimsa and compassion as great virtues. Goswami Tulsidas, the great devotee of Sri Rama and the foremost among Hindi poets, has, in fact, spoken of ahimsa as the highest dharma: '*Parama-dharma shruti-bidita ahimsa*; ahimsa is the greatest dharma according to the Vedas,' and '*parahita saris dharma nahi bhai; para-pida sama nahi adhamai*; there is no dharma like doing good to others, and no *adharma* like causing pain to others'.<sup>15</sup>

### Ahimsa and Violence

It would, however, be utter naivety to believe that non-violence is an absolute virtue in Hinduism and that no exceptions to it are entertained. While for those following the path of spirituality or bhakti, ahimsa is of paramount importance, and the same can perhaps be said of those whose field of activity is learning, teaching, and guiding people on the path of righteousness, there are others, soldiers for example, for whom *himśā* becomes dharma for protecting the weak, the helpless, and those seeking refuge with them. It has been said that if by the killing of a bandit many lives can be saved, that killing cannot be considered *adharma*. In rousing tones, Krishna tells Arjuna to 'stand up and gain glory by conquering your enemies' for 'there is no greater good for a kshatriya than a battle enjoined by duty'.<sup>16</sup> Even while enumerating reasons for his incarnation in different ages, Sri Krishna mentions '*vināśāya ca duṣkṛtām*; for the destruction of the wicked' (4.8).

While recounting the qualities of Sri Rama, Narada tells Valmiki, 'In valour he is equal to Vishnu ... when angry he is like the fire of death,' and yet, 'to look at, he is as dear as the moon, and

in forgiveness, is like the earth'.<sup>17</sup> When Vishwamitra approached Dasharatha with a request to have Rama destroy the demons who were obstructing his yajna, he described Rama as *rājaśārdūla* (a lion among princes) and *satyaaparākrama* (whose valour stems from truth). Tulsidas says, the Lord incarnates himself 'to kill demons and reinstate gods'.<sup>18</sup>

The Gita also takes cognizance of the inherent qualities of brahmanas, kshatriyas, vaishyas, and shudras. Serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance, uprightness, knowledge, wisdom, and faith are enumerated as the natural traits of brahmanas, and heroism, vigour, steadiness, resourcefulness, not fleeing from battle, generosity, and leadership as those of kshatriyas.<sup>19</sup> The Gita also assures us that every person can attain perfection by devoted discharge of his or her respective duties (18.45). In fact, there are exceptions even to this rule. Parashurama, one of the ten incarnations of Vishnu, was born a brahmana. When the kshatriyas became unbridled and arrogant, it was this brahmana who decimated them and finished their reign of terror. It was only when Parashurama himself became egotistic that Sri Rama politely showed him his place; then he retired to the forest to perform tapas. In a graphic portrayal of the Virat Purusha (Cosmic Being), the Rig Veda describes kshatriyas as his arms, *bāhū rājanyaḥ kritāḥ*.

In the Vedic pantheon, while Indra, 'the thunder god', is the conqueror of Vritra, the obstructor, Agni, 'the son of strength', is a mighty benefactor of his worshippers but consumes their enemies like dry bushes, and Varuna, 'the moral governor' severely punishes those who cause infringement of his ordinances, even as he is gracious to the penitent.<sup>20</sup> All major Hindu gods and goddesses—with the possible exception of Brahma and Saraswati, who represent *brāhmaṇa-dharma*—carry lethal weapons to strike down demons and wrongdoers. Vishnu has his Sudarshana chakra (discus), Kaumodakī club, Nandaka sword, and Sharṅga bow; Shiva his trident, Pinaka, and of course the third eye; Mother Durga, the Mahishasura-mardini, has numerous arms and weapons. These they have to ensure that asuras, ter-



rorists, and plunderers do not get away with their destructive designs. Even the Vedic gods are seen joining their votaries to demolish the kingdoms of terror created by *panis* and *dasyus*. However, even as they do this, their devotees look upon them as most kind, compassionate, and benevolent. Speaking symbolically, even as they carry mighty arms, their hands also hold benedictory articles like the lotus, conch, drum (*damaru*), or rosary, and gesture the granting of boons (*vara*) and freedom from fear (*abhaya*).

It is significant that of all the ten divine incarnations of Vishnu, only Vamana and Buddha do not carry weapons or exercise physical or military strength. In order to annihilate *adharma* and re-establish dharma, each of the others has to exercise a physical influence or resort to violence, and in so doing, they only earn the gratitude, love, and devotion of their long-suffering devotees.

In all this, the message conveyed is that while ahimsa is a great virtue, it is circumscribed—like practically all other virtues are—by the contexts of time, place, occasion, and circumstances. Also, as Mahatma Gandhi has pointed out, it can only be practised by the strong. Weak-willed, weak-kneed, and weak-hearted persons cannot, and should not, swear by ahimsa. Lamenting at the plight of the Hindus, Swami Vivekananda exhorted them to shed their slumber, wake up, and stand up as men. He used to say that in Hindu society *tamas* (indolence) was masquerading as *sattva* (virtue), and needed to be replaced with *rajas* (vigour) so that the dormant potential and power of this nation could be harnessed and India could claim her rightful place as a world-leader, *viśva-guru*. Too much emphasis on ahimsa, he said, had made cowards of us. Swamiji also said:

The test of Ahimsa is absence of jealousy. Any man may do a good deed or make a good gift on the spur of the moment or under the pressure of some superstition or priestcraft; but the real lover of mankind is he who is jealous of none. ... So long as this jealousy exists in a heart, it is far away from the perfection of Ahimsa. ... The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his

greatest enemy, that man is the Bhakta, he is the Yogi, he is the Guru of all.<sup>21</sup>

It has been said that there is no such thing as absolute ahimsa. It is not possible even for the most conscientious monk to practise total ahimsa. In order to live, one has perforce to destroy life, however unwillingly or remorsefully. What is important to remember and to practise is purity of heart, equality of vision (*samadr̥ṣṭi*) with respect to all beings, and kindness and compassion for all those who are depressed, deprived, and destitute. Ahimsa, as Swamiji emphasizes, is absence of jealousy, not cherishing even a thought to hurt.

The Gita has the final word. If there is no ego attached, if the intellect is not clouded, and if a job is done as duty without mentally getting involved in its outcome, then 'he does not kill, nor does he become bound (by his actions)—even by killing these creatures.'<sup>22</sup> A very tall order, indeed. But so it is. ☪

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5. Rig Veda, 10.16.9.
6. See *Shabara Bhashya* on *Mimamsa Sutra*, 1.1.2.
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# A Visit to China

Swami Smaranananda

*The Great Wall of China*

CHINA and India—the two most ancient civilizations of the world which continue till now—naturally evoke interest in enquiring minds. Till recently, China had kept its doors and windows to the outside world closed, but lately the doors have opened, and the world is wonderstruck, seeing the rapid strides of progress China has made within a short time. This too produces curiosity and interest among people to know about China. Hence this article.

When a proposal to visit China came to me from Prof. Alan Hunter of Coventry University in England, I became deeply interested. Prof. Hunter is a Sinologist and visits China every year, giving some classes at Beijing University and at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. He told me that Prof. Wang Zhicheng had translated into Mandarin Chinese and published some selections from Swami Vivekananda, and that it would be nice if the book could be released through the Indian embassy in Beijing, with one or two swamis going there to attend the function. Thus the efforts started. I wrote to the Indian embassy about it, but no reply was forthcoming for a few months. When I had almost given up the idea, a letter came from the embassy, giving some positive information.

The best months for visiting China are April and September—spring and autumn. Because of the delay, September 2006 was out of the question. In the meantime, two Chinese devotees from Singapore—Dr Tan Ju Hock and his wife Dr Tan Chay Hoon, who visit Belur Math almost every year—took up the matter most sincerely, and actively contacted the Indian embassy. Once the event was fixed up, they arranged for hotel accommodations in Beijing and Hangzhou (where Zhejiang University is situated). In order to get a Chinese visa, I needed an invitation

from China. This was arranged by Prof. Wang.

Dr Gaur Gopal Das, a close devotee from Kolkata, also wanted to join the team. Then, one Mr Zongin Lee, a young man from Qinhuangdao city in Hebei province, wanted to come and stay at Belur Math for a month. He was not known to us at all, so permission was given for a stay of seven days only. But when he arrived, Drs Hock and Hoon were already at Belur Math, and Mr Lee joined them. So finally the party consisted of Prof. Hunter, Drs Hock and Hoon, Mr Lee, Dr Das, and myself!

When on 12 April 2007 Dr Das and I landed at Beijing, travelling by Singapore Airlines, the other four—Prof. Hunter, Drs Hock and Hoon, and Mr Lee—were there to receive us. We drove straight to the hotel—a long distance from the airport. It was a three-star hotel, moderately priced, but quite comfortable and clean, with all facilities. The hotel was quadrangular in shape, and had a garden in the centre.

At 7 p.m. Prof. Wang Zhicheng came to meet me. He is the person who translated into Chinese some selections from the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* and the *Yoga Sutra* as translated into English and annotated by Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood. This book is titled *How to Know God*. The first Chinese edition sold out in no time, and a second edition was in the offing.

Late in the evening we all left in two taxis in search of the vegetarian restaurant recommended by Mr Lee. In China vegetarian food is not common, even though Buddhist monks take strictly vegetarian food. After a long drive through roads with heavy traffic, we arrived at a vegetarian restaurant. Vegetarian food appeared a bit strange here—a few boiled vegetables and greens and hot sticky rice with sauce. The Chinese take everything steam-

ing hot. That makes the food attractive. Very little spices or oil is used. One eats with chopsticks—two long ones. No spoons or forks are provided unless you ask for them. I tried my hand at the chopsticks, but couldn't succeed! For the next two weeks I did not give up trying to use chopsticks, but unfortunately failed every time! It was quite cold, and we returned to the hotel by 9.30 p.m.—and went immediately into a long sleep.

Let us now have a peep into China's past.

### **Chinese Civilization and Culture**

China's civilization, like India's, is still alive and creating history. So its history cannot be considered as concluded, like that of Greece or Egypt. China's history dates back to 2800 BCE, when legendary rulers ruled the country. Being a vast country, two and a half times the size of India, the country was divided into 1,700 principalities, which later coalesced into fifty-five. From 2200 BCE, various dynasties, one after the other, ruled the country for millennia. Of these, the most important were the Xia, which laid the bases of Chinese government, and the Qin, which conquered all the different principalities, established a unified empire, and gave to China the name by which it is known to the world.

The country was ruled by various emperors of different dynasties through the many centuries. Some of the emperors were enlightened, while others were cruel and given to selfish enjoyments. China had times of disorderliness and decay, but came out of these vicissitudes to establish a firm-handed government. This led to the flourishing of China's culture, poetry, art, and economic organization.

The two greatest names in Chinese thought are Lao-tzu (Laozi) and Confucius. Confucius is a Latinized form of his original name, Kong Qiu. Lao-tzu is considered by some scholars as a non-historical figure, but his book *Tao-te-Ching* (*Daodejing*) is well-known and has been translated into dozens, if not hundreds of languages. Till the present day, it has attracted scholars both Eastern and Western. Tao means the way. It also means the way of Nature, sometimes the Taoist way of wise living. Some Chi-

nese students believe that this book existed long before Lao-tzu. Be that as it may, the thoughts of Lao-tzu as expressed in the *Tao-te-Ching* can be considered as the beginning of higher religion in China.

Confucius was born in 551 BCE in what is now the province of Shandong. We may call him the Socrates of China. Confucius did not teach spirituality or religion. He emphasised morality and character. He was adored by the young people and had many disciples. The influence of Confucius on the Chinese psyche is immense. His teachings have left a permanent impact on the Chinese people. Their common sense and pragmatism—learnt from Confucius—have preserved them as a nation.

### **Buddhism**

Buddhism came to China from India in the first century of the Common Era. It was not the austere creed of the Tathagata, but a Buddhism with stupas, temples, worship, and so on. It was Mahayana Buddhism which provided the common folk with lovable gods—Amitabha Buddha, his incarnation Avalokiteshvara, and his female form Kuan Yin. (In a Buddhist temple in Singapore, the goddess Kuan Yin is represented with sixteen hands.)

Taoism, which was the popular religion before Confucius, now gave way to Buddhism, and got inextricably connected with Buddhism in the Chinese soul. Essentially, the Chinese need gods who will make their life on earth pleasant and happy.

The two sects of Chinese Buddhism which have survived the vicissitudes of the centuries are the Pure Land School (Qingtu) and the Ch'an (Zen in Japanese). The former is a devotional sect, propagating faith and surrender to the mercy of Amitabha and repentance as a means to salvation. Zen Buddhism, which is popular these days, has entered the West through Japan. Ch'an in China had weird practices such as beating and making baffling statements (called *koans* in Japanese) having equally baffling answers. The one purpose seems to be to stun the mind of the practitioner into a state of 'no-mind'. This system of meditation was



*Swami Smarananandaji with a student and the new Vivekananda book, left, and with students at the symposium at Zhejiang University, above*

brought to China from India by Bodhidharma in early 6th century CE.

In this short paper, Tibetan Buddhism, which is a big subject, is not discussed, though today Tibet is part of China.

### **Beijing**

To return to our travelogue: we woke up on 13 April to a pleasant morning. As usual, the hotels provide accommodation and breakfast only. In this hotel, breakfast is supplied in the basement. One should take whatever one wants and then sit down at a table as one likes. Noodles are a favourite with almost everyone—but not with me! There are fruits (mainly watermelon) and various other things, vegetarian and non-vegetarian.

At 10.30 we left for Beijing University. But before reaching there we had to finish our lunch, so we were taken to a vegetarian restaurant. We had good steaming rice, boiled beans, and soya curry. We reached the university by 1.30 p.m. There we were introduced to Prof. Chang, Prof. Jiang Ju-ing Kui of the foreign languages department, and other scholars.

I spoke on 'Vedanta for Modern Man' to an audience of fifty or sixty, mostly students. Of course an interpreter was there. Most of the audience did not understand English. I spoke for fifty minutes or so (including the translation) and answered questions for forty or forty-five minutes. It was quite a lively event. There were more girls than boys and they were quite interested. I explained the universal approach of Vedanta.

One of the students, Binod Singh of Jawaharlal

Nehru University of Delhi, has been doing his post-graduate studies at Beijing University for the last three years. He has picked up quite a bit of Mandarin. I could get much information about China from Binod. He took us round the vast university campus. There is an active department for Sanskrit studies, but no one from there turned up for the lecture! Binod says that the university gets scholars from Germany for teaching Sanskrit, and not from India! There are about 3,000 foreign students at the university, but only one from India—that is Binod (at least, according to him). Education in China is quite expensive. A primary school student has to pay Rs 1,200 per month!

After our visit to the university, we had our dinner at a vegetarian restaurant nearby and returned to our hotel, quite a distance from the university.

On the 14th, at 9.45 a.m.—after breakfast—we left for the Yonghe Lamasery. It is a huge complex consisting of fourteen temples and a monastery. Built in 1694, Yonghegong (Palace of Harmony and Peace) was the residence of Emperor Yongzheng before he ascended the throne. After he came to the throne, he made half of it his temporary dwelling place, and the other half the upper house of Huangjiao (a sect of Tibetan Buddhism). The name Yonghegong was bestowed by the emperor in 1725 CE.

The temple complex consists of five main halls, of which the mountain of five hundred Arhats (Hall of the Dharma Wheel) and the statue of Mai-

*Rock garden, Shanghai, right, and at the park in Beijing, with Mr Lee and Drs Hock and Hoon, far right*





*Yonghegong : the main entrance, above, and a 6 m gilded statue of Tsongkhapa, right*



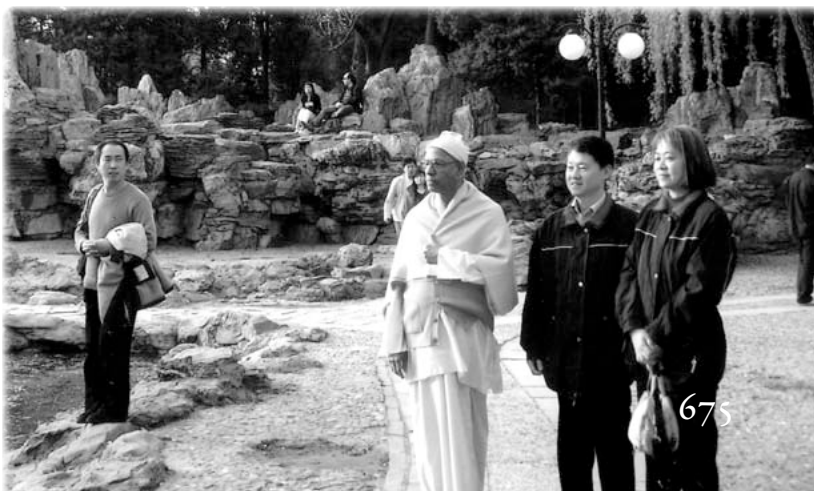
treya are most magnificent. Maitreya is the future Buddha. Carved from a single trunk of sandalwood, the statue of Maitreya rises eighteen metres above the ground and sinks eight metres below it.

Yonghegong is the biggest Tibetan temple in Beijing. There are separate halls dedicated to Maitreya, Shakyamuni Buddha, Avalokiteshvara, and so on. One interesting thing about this very popular temple is the rows of shops on the way to it. The shopkeepers call visitors to buy incense and mementos. It reminds us of our pilgrimage centres in India, where such shops are plenty. The only difference is that, in spite of the shops and eateries, the surroundings are clean. Almost all pilgrims—many of them coming from various parts of China—buy incense sticks and, after lighting them and waving them before the Buddha deities, put them in a huge censer in front of the temple. They keep burning for some time.

From the lamasery, we went to the Confucian temple. It is also big, but as renovation and repairs are going on, visitors are not allowed to enter. It is surprising that a temple has been erected for Con-

fucius, who did not bother about religion or God! After lunch at a nearby vegetarian restaurant, we went back to our hotel for a brief rest.

We had an appointment at the Indian embassy at 5.00 p.m. It is quite far from our hotel. Since we reached the embassy a bit early, we spent some time in a nearby park, which was quite interesting. When we arrived at the embassy, we were received at the gate by the first secretary, Sri M Sridharan. The recently appointed Indian ambassador, Mrs Nirupama Rao, met us after a few minutes. The embassy staff—about twenty-five persons—was present. Mrs Rao spoke for three or four minutes. Then I spoke about how our diplomats can better serve our country by being better acquainted with our hoary culture and history. Our work in foreign countries should not be confined to political issues alone. Then Mrs Rao invited anyone who wanted to do so to say a few words. Since no one else was forthcoming, Prof. Hunter spoke about the two recently translated books, selections from Swami Vivekananda and the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali. In the course of conversation, Ms Rao told me that



she had attended Swami Ranganathananda's lectures at the National Academy of Administration at Mussoorie many years back. The meeting ended with refreshments and tea.

### The Great Wall

On Sunday the 15th, we left in the morning—six of us, Drs Hock and Hoon, Prof. Hunter, Mr Lee, Dr Das, and humble self—for seeing the Great Wall of China, one of the human-made wonders of the world. It stretches 4,000 miles along the northern boundary of China, over mountain ridges and through valleys. It was first built by Shi Huangdi, the emperor who brought all of China under a single monarch in 221 BCE. The building began in 214 BCE, and took ten years, incorporating older already-existing walls. It was rebuilt and repaired many times over the centuries. The wall as it is today was mostly built during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). It is adorned with massive gateways, from where the attacking Huns could be detected and destroyed.

Tourists can visit the north-western portion of this wall at Mutianyu, a tourist resort, some 70–80 km from Beijing. Here the wall passes over ridges, now climbing, now descending. After climbing nearly a hundred steps, we got into a cable car. The car goes on circling. Wherever it stops, one should get in or out within a few seconds; otherwise, it will move on. Six persons can get into a car and we were just six! After spending some time on the wall, which is frequented by tourists, we came down and had lunch at a hotel there. We returned to our residence by 3.45 p.m. Late in the evening we visited Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. At dinner, we had Chinese *jalebis*—called *cheni*. They can't compare with Indian *jalebis*, particularly of Kamarpukur!

### Hangzhou

On the 16th morning, we took a flight to Hangzhou, where we were to attend a two-day seminar on 'Inter-civilization Harmony and Creation' at Zhejiang University.

Hangzhou is one of the most beautiful cities

of the world, picturesquely situated in a valley surrounded by low hills. A great lake, which is a great attraction for tourists, adorns its western side. The city is clean, with beautiful roads, flowering plants adding to their beauty. Plenty of greenery keeps the city pollution-free to a great extent.

We reached Hangzhou at 12.45 p.m., were received at the airport by two students with flower bouquets, and were transported by a bus for delegates to a hotel near the university. The hotel was quite comfortable. At 7 in the evening we met the students, and I spoke on 'Bhagavadgita : A Universal Scripture'. The meeting had been arranged by Prof. Wang. Many of his students were present. There were around sixty students, girls were again more in number. Surprisingly, many of them knew English. They put some intelligent questions, particularly one girl who had a fairly good knowledge of Vedanta. Even after I left Hangzhou, she wrote to me asking some more questions, which I answered after reaching Singapore! Indeed, Prof. Wang, through his translations, has created interest in Vedanta and allied subjects among his students.

On the 17th we got ready by 8.30 a.m. and were transported to the university by a deluxe bus. At 9 was the inaugural session and opening ceremony. It lasted 40 minutes. It was addressed by Prof. Zhang Xi, Director of President's Office, Zhejiang University, and by Prof. Yuan Zhenguo, leader from Ministry of Education, Social Sciences Division. The moderator was Prof. Pang Xuequan.

At 9.40 there was a photo session, and a group photo was taken of all the delegates. It was followed by a tea-cum-coffee break. The next session, which began at 10, went on till noon. There were about sixty delegates, and ten or more volunteers, students from the university. The sessions were managed well. But almost all the speakers spoke in Chinese. (Of course, their speeches were translated.) Most of them spoke about Confucianism and other China-related subjects. One constantly recurring theme seemed to be that China should return to its time-tested ancient values and should not always copy the West. There were some delegates



from other countries: Kuwait, Italy, France, Turkey, Switzerland, USA, Japan, Egypt, and Spain. Few spoke on the subject for the seminar: Harmony and Creation (Creativity?). Lunch was taken at noon. Fortunately for me Dr Hoon had brought some buttermilk from the bazaar. So thoughtful! She took particular care of my needs. I didn't attend the afternoon session. At 4.30 p.m. there was a visit to the university's Zijingang campus.

The next morning at 8.30 all the delegates assembled at the two university halls, where two concurrent sessions were to be held. Prof. Hunter was the moderator at one of the morning sessions. In another session, he spoke on 'Religious Pluralism and Social Harmony'. He particularly emphasized the harmony of religions as practised and preached by Sri Ramakrishna and propagated in the Western world by Swami Vivekananda. In this session, Prof. Mao Dan from Hong Kong spoke well on 'A Case Study on Model of Religious Harmony in Modern Society of Inter-Religious Relations in Hong Kong'. In the afternoon session, I spoke on 'Harmony and Creativity'. All the speeches in English had been sent to the organizers much in advance so that they could be translated into Chinese. Even then, my speech was translated sentence by sentence. I felt that it was well-received.

Swami Medhasananda, the swami-in-charge of Nippon Vedanta Kyokai, Japan, had already arrived in Shanghai, and came at 11.45 a.m. with Alok Kundu, an ex-student of the Ramakrishna Mission's branch at Rahara. He attended the afternoon session and left for Shanghai in the evening. The valedictory session was over by 5.45 p.m. After that I didn't join for dinner or the cruise on the lake late in the evening. I was too tired for that!

Next morning, the 19th, we went to see the Lingyin temple. It is also known as Yunhin temple. Situated to the north-west of West Lake, the grand temple is concealed in a thick forest. Originally founded in 326 CE, it was reconstructed at the end of the Qing dynasty. It is one of the ten most renowned temples in China. The main buildings include Devarajas' Hall (Hall of Heavenly Kings),

Mahavira Hall, and Bhaishajyaguru hall. It has the largest Buddha statue in China, which is 24.8 metres high and carved out of camphor wood. There are valuable relics in the temple, including Sanskrit palm-leaf manuscripts of Buddhist sutras.

Facing the Lingyin temple, across a stream, are tall, ancient trees and many grotesque rock carvings which appear like dragons, running elephants, tigers, etc., besides many images of Laughing Buddhas. This is called the 'Peak that Flew Here'. There is a mythological story about it: that this is actually the Vulture Peak where Buddha preached and meditated, and that it flew from India to Hangzhou overnight to prove the greatness of the Buddha Dharma.

Incidentally, we went to a huge three-storied bookshop with an escalator, but found no books in English on the ground floor—all were in Chinese; and on the first floor, except for three or four, all the other books were in Chinese!

### Shanghai

At 2 p.m. we left by car for Shanghai. It is a three-hours' drive on a beautiful road. On either side we see the developing China. Vegetables and other crops are grown in greenhouses, also called poly-houses, in vast areas. Industries are also coming up everywhere. These provinces are rich and production-oriented.

We reached the Mariott Hotel, where our host, Subrata Mukherjee came within a few minutes and took us to his house in Windsor Place. The Drs Hock and Hoon went to a nearby hotel where they had already booked accommodations. Subrata is an ex-student of Ramakrishna Mission's schools at Purulia and Narendrapur. There are about 3,000 Indians working in Shanghai, mostly as software engineers or in high positions in some industries. A good number of Bengalis are there. In the evening we—Dr Das and myself—left for Alok Kundu's house, where Swami Medhasananda was staying. Alok had invited four or five friends. We had a chat. Some bhajans were sung and there was reading from *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. After a sumptuous dinner, we left for Subrata's house.

Shanghai is the biggest city of China, with a population of 16 million. It is also the financial and commercial capital, and covers an area of 6,341 sq. km. It is the most cosmopolitan city of China. With all the modern attractions, it is a good destination for corporate investments and business travellers. Located on the sea coast and at the midpoint of China's long coastline, it is easily accessible by land, air, and sea. Shanghai's transport system is world-class. The maglev rail going into the airport takes only seven and a half minutes to cover a distance of thirty four kilometres and reaches speeds of 430 km per hour. There are many scenic spots, Buddhist temples, etc. which attract tourists. Shanghai has a tower which was, at the time it was built, the highest in the world. Now Taipei (and recently Dubai) have built towers higher than that. So China is building another still higher one. This new one will rise more than 500 metres! The earlier one, known as Oriental Pearl TV Tower, is 468 metres high. I was told that the number of high-rise buildings in Shanghai with 40 storeys and above is more than that of such buildings in New York and Chicago put together! We spent some time on the riverfront and then went to the Oriental Pearl TV Tower.

On the morning of the 20th, Drs Hock and Hoon came to pick us up from Subrata's residence. They took us to a rock garden in old Shanghai. This garden was built two hundred years ago by a gentleman in memory of his father. With its greenery and rocks of different shapes and sizes, the garden is quite interesting. From there we went to Jade Buddha temple. It is a Ch'an temple built in 1882 in honour of two jade Buddhas from Myanmar. The sitting jade Buddha is 1.9 metres tall, and is impressively carved from a single piece of jade. Hundreds of devotees make an annual pilgrimage to this temple.

We returned to Subrata's house and had lunch there. In the afternoon Subrata took us to the bund on the Huangpu river, a branch of the mighty Yangtze. The buildings along the shoreline represent various styles of architecture—Gothic, Baroque, Roman, and of course, Chinese. The whole area is splendidly illuminated. This area is called 'Pearl of

the Orient', and draws a great number of tourists.

On the 21st morning, Drs Hock and Hoon came to Subrata's house and took us to the nearby zoo to see the red panda and other animals. The panda is an endangered animal. We returned by 11 a.m. Subrata, Dr Das, and I went to Subhendu Chowdhury's house for lunch.

In the afternoon, at 5 o'clock, I gave a talk to about 25 assembled devotees. It was arranged at the clubhouse of Windsor Park, where Subrata's house is situated. I spoke in a general way but with reference to Sri Sri Thakur. Though except for two persons it was a Bengali audience, the talk was in English.

### **Return**

At 11 a.m. Drs Hock and Hoon took Dr Das and me to the airport. There was terrific traffic jam, due to heavy traffic. We went to the maglev rail station and reached the airport in just seven and a half minutes! The airport is kept wonderfully spick and span, though I would rate Singapore airport as the best-kept airport in the world.

Nowadays, they don't allow even nail-cutters in the cabin baggage. A small pair of scissors is, of course, more dangerous! So the security check took that away, but mercifully did not confiscate the nail-cutter. The Singapore Airlines flight left on time at 2.30 p.m. and reached Singapore at 7.45 a.m. It took only ten minutes to get the registered baggage. How different from our Indian airports! Swami Muktirupananda, who had gone to Kuala Lumpur, returned at 12 midnight. He was held up at Johor Baharu due to heavy traffic.

On the 23rd many devotees came to meet me. On the 24th, I was advised to go and see the 'dancing fountains' on the seashore. There was a big crowd. But the fountains didn't dance. Only some boys and girls danced wildly. Next morning, I went to see some flower shops—huge ones covering almost two acres. Cut flowers are kept in an ice-cold enclosure. In the evening I left for the airport, took the flight to Kolkata, and reached Belur Math by 11 p.m.

Goodbye, China!



# ***A Thai Monk's Glorious Crusade***

**N Karthikeyan**

**I**T was nearly twenty-five years ago that the world realized that a killer disease called Aids was sweeping across the globe and that it had no known cure. The deadly disease, which probably originated in Africa, has spread with the speed of lightning and continues to claim victims at an alarming pace.

In the Asian subcontinent, especially in South East Asian countries like India and Sri Lanka, Aids is spreading its tentacles very fast. To save people from the disastrous consequences of this infection, many international agencies and multinational organizations like the UN are implementing a series of action-plans aimed at prevention.

After studying the remarkable success that Thailand has achieved in checking the incidence of Aids and mitigating its consequences, as reported in a national study, the UN came to the conclusion that the workers of various religious groups had a very important role to play in alleviating the hardship of the unfortunate people who had contracted the grievous disease, including the innocent children who had acquired it from their parents. The Thai society has had a rich moral tradition, but this had been much weakened of late due to the excessive influx of tourists from the West. Religious workers have played an effective role in arresting this trend and have also contributed significantly in helping people with Aids face the challenges posed by the disease.

Wishing to project the example of Thailand as an eye-opener to other Asian nations, the UN arranged two educational tours for religious workers from Sri Lanka to Thai regions with a high prevalence of Aids. The programme was undertaken in collaboration with the Sri Lankan health department, and I was a part of this team.

As part of this tour we visited various hospitals and religious centres that were taking care of Aids patients as well as select tourist resorts and popular nightspots which were hotbeds for spreading the disease. We met people with Aids, including affected children and their parents and relatives. We also interacted with Buddhist and Hindu monks, Christian and Muslim religious workers, government officials, doctors, scientists, and nightclub workers. All of them had swiftly swung into action and saved the Thai nation from certain catastrophe. The government officials and doctors narrated the remarkable contribution of monks in reversing the Aids epidemic. I share some of my experiences in this article.

## ***The Western Influence***

Thailand is a deeply religious nation. Though Buddhism is the majority religion and Muslims form a sizable minority, Thai society has been much influenced by Hindu philosophy and culture since ancient times. Family values and Indian cultural heritage have been held in respect. The Ramayana and Mahabharata have been popular over the centuries, and the Thais respect and revere monks.

In the 1950s, the Thai government, hoping for an economic miracle, decided to encourage tourism at the beautiful beaches and seaside resorts; Western tourists were particularly targeted. This was the time of the Vietnam War (1964–1976), and the Thai government had permitted American soldiers the use of its territory for transit. The economic growth was accelerated by liberal American financial aid.

Employment opportunities boomed in the tourist resorts and cities. Many young people migrated to these areas for their livelihood. But the econom-



*The Sri Lankan team visits a locus of HIV spread, above, and studies the methods and techniques adopted by a Thailand Church in rehabilitating HIV-infected and affected children, below.*

ic growth was not quite balanced. Moreover, the glorious cultural traditions of the country experienced an unexpected setback. Increased contact with Western culture coupled with freely circulating money increased the attraction for Western luxury goods, sensual pastimes, and alcoholic drinks. Vulgar floor shows, erotic films, nightlife, and prostitution as an organized industry started flourishing. In due course, this permissive lifestyle affected the will power of the youth and led to a general loosening of morals. The new cultural liberalization spread to many other parts of the country too, much like a virus.

### **The Viral Onslaught**

It was also at this time that Aids had started spreading far and wide. The new cultural conditions in Thailand were particularly conducive for the invasion of Aids. HIV (Human Immunodeficiency

Virus) was soon infecting people at an alarming rate. Despite a growing economy, Thailand lacked the infrastructure and economic strength needed to effectively handle this menace. Notwithstanding the various steps initiated by the government to contain the virus, HIV spread fast to epidemic proportions. Many people died in this onslaught. Thailand has a population of 65 million, and it has lost 650,000 people to Aids! In 1991, every day 383 persons were being infected with HIV and 3 persons were dying of Aids.

But over the years, the efforts of the government and several independent agencies started bearing fruit. By 2004, the incidence of fresh infection had come down to 60 per day, though the number of daily deaths increased to 165. The Thai government acknowledges the significant contribution made by monks in checking the spread of infection and believes that in the future too their involvement is imperative if greater victory is to be achieved over this killer disease. Individual, family, and social lifestyles play a significant role in the spread of Aids. It was this realization that led the Thai government to co-opt religious workers for the Aids-prevention campaign.

### **Training for Survival**

The government held crucial consultations with religious leaders to evolve a common approach to tackling the problem without impinging upon religious sentiments and the national cultural heritage. Accordingly, religious leaders and workers were duly trained in the strategies and methods for preventing Aids. Today, most religious institutions in Thailand have at least one person trained to actively participate in Aids-prevention work. This is one of the major reasons for Thailand's recovery from the brink of disaster.

The course contents of the training programmes for religious workers were tailored to suit current needs, with emphasis on rendering service, both at the spiritual and physical levels. The training focused on such diverse facets as increasing awareness about the disease, counselling on its psychological

and socio-economic aspects, body consciousness, factors which help in the nation's progress, and appropriate spiritual guidance.

The religious workers targeted their HIV/Aids awareness campaign and counselling strategies at three categories of people: (i) those infected with HIV; (ii) those affected by Aids (though not infected themselves, people in this group were ostracized because a spouse or parent had died due to Aids); and (iii) the general population.

For the two categories of the infected and affected, an essential need is support and guidance to boost their morale. Being compassionate to them, guiding them in planning their lives, getting them appropriate medical treatment, informing them about ways to prevent spread of the disease, involving them in spiritual activities, and teaching them meditation are other priority needs.

Depending on local needs, some religious workers are also involved in looking after the infected and the affected by providing suitable employment opportunities and helping them appropriately reorient their lifestyles. For general awareness, workers conduct 'awakening workshops', seminars, and exhibitions, especially during religious festivals; schools are also specifically targeted. They also organize holiday camps for the youth. During such camps, youth are taught about the need for a regulated and righteous life, especially the importance of brahmacharya (continence), being faithful to one's marriage partner, and other such virtues. The Aids workers do not stop with spiritual counselling alone. Follow-up action includes showing educational films, enacting dramas, arranging excursions to centres for people recuperating from Aids, and holding discussions with these people. All these give the public a general understanding about the serious consequences that can follow from not being careful.

Being kind to people with Aids and accepting them as members in the family and society is no doubt essential. But more than that, safe and harmonious ways of living with them need to be taught. This will reduce ostracism and its negative



*Buddhist monks and people with HIV whom they serve, above; people with HIV tell their stories, below*

fallout and will create a conducive social climate that will enable people to seek treatment without fear of repercussions. Besides doing this, religious workers in Thailand also encourage people at risk to get themselves tested to ensure that they are free from the infection.

### **What People Say**

Let us hear what some people with HIV have to say:

'After marriage at the age of twenty-two, when I got myself examined medically, I realized that I was HIV-positive. Thinking that my happy married life had ended midway, I even decided to commit suicide. A nurse who knew me took me to a monk. The support of that monk and the meditation techniques I had learnt during my younger days helped me to plan the rest of my life. I started meditating for thirty minutes every day. Till today I do it regularly. Hence, though I still carry HIV, I have been able to live a normal life for the past seventeen years without any medicines. For the last several years,



**Ven. Alongkot  
Dikkapanyo**

I have found fulfilment in Aids prevention work. When I was twenty, I wanted to earn lots of money and indulged in a free and permissive lifestyle. That is how I contracted HIV. Therefore please tell everyone that even for a small indiscretion, there is the possibility of contracting this virus.' This is the plea of Ms Kim Kum Jay.

'I lived the life of a good Christian. I am not a womanizer, and I used to lead a stable life. During my compulsory army-training period, I started spending time with my friends, indulging in the simple pleasures of life, and it was then that I contracted HIV by getting into wrong company. Words cannot describe the tribulations I underwent. With the help of medicines, I pulled on for eleven years. With the help of my brother and other religious workers, I managed to come out of my trials and now I find satisfaction in doing social service and Aids-eradication work. If we do not select good friends and live a controlled and righteous life, our life will become miserable. This is the experience and conclusion of hundreds of HIV patients like me,' says Mr Dong. 'Please, for God's sake, do not call people with Aids or anyone else sinners and make them feel psychologically weak,' he requests.

Many other people with Aids whom we met at different places told us about the phenomenal contribution made by religious workers and the importance of spiritual counselling and training in helping people cope with the consequences of their illness.

*Kanchan* (money and greed for material posses-

sions) and *kama* (lust) bring misery and lead people to their downfall, says Sri Ramakrishna. The experiences of the people of Thailand show us the universal relevance of this teaching. Swami Vivekananda has warned: 'Giving up the senses makes a nation survive. As a proof of this, here is history today telling us of mushroom nations rising and falling almost every century—starting up from nothingness, making vicious play for a few days, and then melting.' But it is Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi who has shown us how we should treat people with Aids with compassion and kindness. She emphasizes, 'I am the mother of the wicked as I am the mother of the virtuous.'

### **A Humane Monk**

Dr Alongkot Dikkapanyo was born in Thailand in 1955. After returning from Australia with an engineering degree, he worked for a few years as an academic attached to the ministry of agriculture, with the hope of creating a giant recycling and litter separation plant. As many Thai youth did in those days, he too wished to be a Buddhist monk for a few years, and accepted ordination in 1986. In 1990, he went to a monastery called Wat Phra Baht Nam Phu in Lopburi, 120 km north of Bangkok, desirous of learning Buddha's teachings. An incident that happened there in 1992 changed the course of his life.

A child who had acquired Aids from its parents was admitted to a hospital after both its parents had died. None came forward to look after or treat him. Hearing about the pathetic plight of the child, Dr Dikkapanyo decided to help. But even as he held his hands, the patient died. He realized that this death occurred due to the non-availability of proper care and medical facilities. That very day he had his life's mission set: to provide proper comfort and consolation to people with Aids till their death.

The very next day he brought two people with Aids to the monastery for treatment; they had been living as social outcasts. Shocked by this act, all his brother monks ran away from the monastery in fear and shame. Hearing of this, even Dr Dikkapanyo's



guru cautioned him that this was not the work of a monk. But Dr Dikcapanyo was not deterred. He continued to gather more information on Aids and realized the great danger it posed to society as a potentially explosive time-bomb. He thought about the various options available to check its spread and control its impact.

This disease clearly had the ability to spread far and wide if those who already had it were not identified and prevented from spreading it further. Dr Dikcapanyo realized that identification of infected people was crucial for controlling the disease. Many who knew or suspected they had Aids might not want to reveal it to their kith and kin for fear of social stigma. Hence the solution lay in creating a conducive atmosphere, where people with Aids would feel less diffident about revealing themselves and would feel convinced that society will look after them with tender care and affectionate concern during the course of the disease. Dr Dikcapanyo decided to provide this loving concern to people with Aids so as to mitigate their suffering as much as possible. He felt that only then could they die in peace.

### ***Ostracized by Society***

He bought a piece of land to provide living accommodation for people with Aids and started looking after them single-handedly. He faced public opposition from many quarters. The agriculturists nearby knew about Aids only from hearsay, and so, fearing the unknown, opposed the monk at every step. It is customary for Buddhist monks to go daily from house to house for their food. The villagers thought that putting food in his begging bowl could lead to infection and so started refusing him food. At another time, the villagers made a joint representation to the temple saying that as the waste water from the residences of people with Aids was mixing with the canal water, the disease would spread to the paddy fields and might affect the people who ate the food grown there.

Many who did not foresee a day when Aids eradication would be the single most important agenda



*Children with HIV: they may live only a few years more*

for the whole nation argued that it was pointless to take care of those who were counting their days to death. To this, Dr Dikcapanyo replied: 'We are all going to die one day. So surely we should be providing these suffering people with compassion and mercy. If we turn our backs on them, how can we call ourselves human?' His reply touched everyone's conscience and made them ponder.

### ***Time: The Best Healer***

The arguments and counter-arguments went on for several years; but Dr Dikcapanyo continued his service activities. Only when the whole of Thailand was feeling the suffocating grip of Aids did the local people begin to realize the importance of his selfless service. Then they began to help him little by little. Those who opposed him once draw consolation today from supporting him in his work in any small way they can.

Today his monastery is spread over an area of 300 acres. It has a modern hospital for 400 people who wage a daily battle with death, a cemetery, a school for 200 affected children, 200 dwelling houses for people with Aids (many of whom are disowned by relatives and are nearing death) to spend their last few days with their family members, an Aids research centre, a training centre for Aids rehabilitation workers, a museum, a library, lecture halls where Aids awareness campaigns are held, sports arenas, and a temple. Since 1992, more than 20,000 people with Aids have died in this monastery. Thousands of people seeking admission



*A sombre exhibition: ashes of several thousand people piled around the Buddha, left, and the preserved body of an Aids victim*

are registered on the waiting list.

Now that circumstances have changed and awareness levels have improved, twenty monks are assisting and helping Dr Dikkapanyo in his work. Still he continues to meet residents individually, and enquires about their welfare. Dr Dikkapanyo's work does not end inside the monastery. He conducts awareness programmes in schools, colleges, and villages. For those already infected, he provides detailed information about different stages of HIV infection.

The enterprising monk is now building an ideal village where people who are in the final stages of the disease can prolong life by adopting simple techniques of developing their immunity and can live harmoniously with people who are not infected. This village is being equipped with all modern amenities and would show the public that many of their fears about Aids are unfounded.

Today the Wat Phra Baht Nam Phu monastery is one of the foremost centres in the world for creating awareness about Aids. Every day, thousands of children and adults come here on educational tours and learn about Aids, the methods for looking after people with Aids, and the steps in prevention.

### **A Sombre Exhibition**

The monastery has kept the embalmed bodies of thirteen Aids victims for public viewing. The ashes of cremated victims are put in bags marked with their names and addresses and kept around a statue of Buddha. 'When people see these visual

after-effects for themselves, the impact is sure to be long lasting, more than that through propaganda about the after-effects of Aids. I believe that this will bring about a change in their lifestyle pattern,' says Dr Dikkapanyo.

Dr Dikkapanyo's selfless work and service towards humanity have been recognized and honoured widely—by the UN, the Thai royalty, the government of Thailand, and many international organizations. Lately, his own spiritual guru also praised him, saying, 'To have had a disciple like Dikkapanyo is our great good fortune.' Considering his guru's words as his blessings, Dr Dikkapanyo is presently engaged in expanding his activities, winning more hearts, and consoling more helpless souls with renewed determination.

Here we may recall Swami Vivekananda's immortal words: 'He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-Yoga.'

Dr Dikkapanyo is an example of a messenger of God who had an ambition, a cherished vision, who defied the prophets of doom and emerged victorious, keeping company of his own conscience with courage. His patients, however, will remember him as a simple monk and saviour who taught them how to value 'human life' and how to be thankful for God's abundant grace and infinite mercy. ❧

# ***Social Seismography in Indian Legal Philosophy***

**Dr N L Mitra**

*(Continued from the previous issue)*

JUDICIAL decisions have been broadening the horizons of human rights jurisprudence. It has been a long journey from *Gopalan*<sup>9</sup> to *Golak Nath*,<sup>10</sup> from 'procedure established by law' to 'due process'. There has also been significant vertical growth in human rights jurisprudence on public interest litigation,<sup>11</sup> right to food,<sup>12</sup> right to work,<sup>13</sup> right to shelter,<sup>14</sup> right to health,<sup>15</sup> right to environment,<sup>16</sup> right to privacy,<sup>17</sup> right to legal aid,<sup>18</sup> right against sex aggrandizement,<sup>19</sup> right to education,<sup>20</sup> and right to honour and dignity.<sup>21</sup> The multidimensional growth in international human rights law has served as a beacon to the national legal system, especially when the state has threatened to impinge on the rights of powerless individual citizens.

### ***Conflict between Ideological and Material Dialectics***

The internal tensions within legal thought are related to its rational and ethical foundations. This rational and ethical basis is provided by economics and religion. The use of ideological and material dialectics in legal discourse is not something new to our time. What is new is the reconstruction. For instance, in the general agreement under WTO, an argument for 'most-favoured nation' was advanced as a summation of (i) the principle of equal treatment for all member nations, and (ii) the principle of non-discrimination between a national functionary and a functionary of a fellow member nation. This position has a strong ideological basis: equality. But when the agreement also lays down the principle of 'national interest', it resorts to material dialectics. This is an antithesis. The resolution of this conflict depends upon the position of the

national law on 'national interest'! Thus 'food security', 'national security', and 'public interest' may all be considered as grounds of national interest. How would the court decide in a litigation challenging tariff barriers if there is inflation as well as a tariff barrier on the import of food articles? Here, if the court follows the ideological argument, it may decide the barrier bad in law. If the court gives precedence to material reasoning, then it may rely on the state's representation of 'national interest' and declare the trade barrier valid.

This type of interactive dialectic is at present very apparent in law and in the administration of justice. Is justice the other side of law? Often it does not seem to be so. For example, in a recent article in the *Times of India*, Justice Krishna Iyer made a plea that 'courts have to be compassionate to the poor'. Two days later a rejoinder appeared in a letter to the editor: 'the law has to be equal to all'. Justice Iyer was passionately arguing for an ideological stand in the materially divergent and often paradoxical social structure that is India's. But the plea for 'equality before the law' can also be materially juxtaposed with the ideological framework. Some will argue for a strict and narrow interpretation of law while administering the end product, justice. Others will argue that the sense of 'justice delivered' goes deeper, especially in a complex conflict-of-interests situation. Material reasoning is self-explanatory, whereas ideological or deontic reasoning is often subjective and hence debatable. Ideology and materiality may be so intertwined in any given social phenomenon that the line of reasoning separating the viewpoints may remain too obscure to allow for certainty.

### **Operational Dynamics of Rational Jurisprudence**

With rationality firming up human society, the transition from rationality to humanism, and from humanism to transcendental consciousness begins. It would be wrong to assume that the philosophy of any living institution or instrument of complex growth and development—both in the physical and mental realms—remains static throughout this transition. Law and legal discourse, some Kantian philosophers may argue, is a ‘definitional discourse’ that distinguishes law from science, which according to them is a ‘descriptive discourse’. A scientific discourse is carried out through observation, analysis, experimentation, and generalization. It is autonomous, self-evident, and uniform. Legal discourse, on the other hand, is based on human problems in society, and involves sensitization, conceptualization, idealization, hypothecation, theorizing, and legislation. Legal discourse is naturally dynamic and depends upon the growing conflict of interests resulting from the growth in size and complexity of human society. To me, this apparent distinction between law and science appears superficial because ‘definition’ and ‘description’ are often confusing as terms, and both law and science use not only both types of propositions, but also complex propositions which are definitional and descriptive at the same time.

Much like chaos theory in physical science, anarchy theory in social science looks into historical and anthropological courses of high-tension situations, huge compressions through external power (conceived of as ‘external force’ in material science), and the compulsion to coagulate or de-coagulate communities of human beings in the early stages of pre-state society. Social institutions were built up with various socio-political instruments, which finally got the colour of law, obedience to which was imposed by the exercise of religious and political power. Both external force (the power to ‘design the behaviour of others’ to ensure obedience) and internal pressures (the psychological impact of emotion, faith, reason, and the like) interacted to build up the structures and paradigms regulating

social phenomena in those formative stages. The growth of law in human history must have been painfully slow. Power in its crudest sense preceded the effort, intention, and intellection required for validation of power through law. Ruling powers used to command obedience by force and would then perhaps validate their actions by a process that came to be called law. It is for this reason that some legal philosophers like Sir Henry Maine and Malinowski thought that quality of law is a very important index in measuring progress, quality of life, and the degree of freedom in any society.<sup>22</sup> If ‘one world’ is still a Utopia, a progressive world may be envisaged in terms of greater participation, a level playing field, and a minimal state. It may be argued that growth of law as a historical compulsion has to precede philosophizing on law.

### **Indian Legal System and Social Change**

Pre-British India was traditionally following an ecclesiastical system of law based on the individual’s religious affiliations. Legal principles were fused with religious, ethical, and moral issues. Consequently, administration of law was based primarily on the identity and interests of particular religious groups. Criminal law was based on moral codes, transactional or business law on the prevailing ethical standards, and family law on scriptural injunctions on religious purity. There were strong pressures, both external and internal, for rule of law during the British Raj. The British masters, for the first time, started using British common law logic to bring about uniformity of law—initially by codification, and then by importing the common law judicial culture. Had it not been colonized, India would perhaps have continued with a many-sectored and compartmentalized legal system for many more decades. That would have served as an example of social plurality, but would also have worked against social cohesion. A legal system enforced by the command of the sovereign, with the basic Anglo-American jurisprudential character of establishing ‘equality before the law and equal protection of law’, was first introduced during the British Raj. In all matters of revenue law, trade

and business law, criminal law, procedural civil and criminal law, court rules, and the acquisition and transfer of property, the British masters introduced a uniform common law by undertaking extensive legal codification, going well beyond the legal culture of the common law tradition of Britain.

The only exception was the law regulating family relations. This was possibly because the British had burnt their fingers in the 1857 war of independence, when the common people and Indian soldiers in the British army were enraged by hurt religious sentiments. So the community laws continued to deal with personal and family relations and issues like joint family, marriage, minority and childhood, divorce, adoption, inheritance, wills, gifts, and the like. Thus India developed a highly mixed legal culture having a diverse law and legal administration. Private and personal relations have been completely separated from public relations. Maintaining this distinction is a very tricky affair. Even during the British period, legal interpretations between the two systems requiring apportionment of higher value to one system or one interpretation often led to social tension.

Independent India started walking the corridors of constitutional law and practice under this set-up. Initially, the incorporation of the Government of India Act of 1935 within the constitutional framework was insisted upon by the fathers of the constituent assembly, who made the constitution of India a Hobbsian model of social contract—in which people were required to sacrifice all their rights to those who were to govern.<sup>23</sup> Excepting fundamental rights expressly given back to the people and a few other rights referred to in the constitution of India, there are no residuary rights belonging to the people. India did not get the Westminster model of government. In spite of all the Nehruvian twists or judicial flavour of common law culture, the constitution of India could not be approximated to the Westminster model. It could not even be brought near the Lockean model, in which all rights rest with the people excepting the right of interpretation given to the state by the people. Added to this

was the physical nearness to the Soviet Union and the romanticism of socialism that made the Indian constitutional governance rigid, top-down, and non-participative. The situation became further complicated because of the natural as well as deliberate alienation of various interest groups. Alienation was more natural than identification in a country of India's size and multicultural social structure. India did not live one day and did not sleep one night without an act of terrorism occurring in one part of the motherland or another. Thus, in the land of Gandhi, a 'brown' ruling class replaced the 'white' rulers in an atmosphere marked by the use of force and counter force. This gave rise to many complexes.

### ***Integration of Legal Reasoning: A Greater Challenge***

The constitution of India was an immediate and direct legal exercise in times of riot, bloodbath, and partition. In view of the anarchy that accompanied partition of the subcontinent, the main concern was to prove to the external world and even more to its own conscience that India would remain multicultural and multi-religious with liberty for all its citizens. In that situation, assuring the rights of the minority was the main constitutional responsibility. That brought to the fore the challenge of harmonizing the constitutional values of liberty, equality, and fundamental freedom with religious and ethical reasoning. Religion came out from being a matter of private faith and exercise to the public stage of constitutional discourse. The rational application of constitutional law and power to the multi-religious ethics and practices of our society was the first challenge; and we are still unable to turn this multi-religious and multicultural social structure into our strength. People still doubt the possibility of social inequalities being so arranged as to 'reasonably be to everybody's advantage' and not incapacitate anyone from holding any public position or office. Diversity of culture, ethnicity, religious faith, and language can all work against social cohesion when there is a crisis of identity—even though they form a beautiful social mosaic

in the highly idealized situation of social harmony. Harmonizing religious arguments with secular reasoning is indeed a very complex task.

Let us take an example. The maintenance given to a divorced wife under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code was always a bone of contention within the Muslim community but was never contested so fiercely as in the *Shah Bano* case.<sup>24</sup> The debate became more intense when the Supreme Court started authenticating its judgment by interpreting the text of the Quran, thus pitting public law against private law. In other words, religious legal reason was being used here for the validation of criminal legal principles. This was widely contested by the community because the application for maintenance was pleaded purely on the grounds of criminal law. Similarly, granting preferred fundamental rights under the constitution of India to religious minorities must have prompted the Arya Samaj,<sup>25</sup> the Ramakrishna Mission,<sup>26</sup> the Sikhs,<sup>27</sup> and the Jains<sup>28</sup> to plead for obtaining the preferential rights given to religious minorities. The admixture of civil and political right to equality under the constitution with the personal law attributed to religious groups would necessarily create such tension. The constitutional legal principles of the 1935 Act did not have any such complexities, though the provision for separate electorates and communal representation in the Act of 1909 led to social tension. So whenever there has been an attempt to fuse or mutually adjust two different parameters of reasoning in the administration of law, there has been tension.

(To be concluded)

## Notes and References

9. *Gopalan v. State of Madras*, AIR 1950 SC 27.
10. *Golok Nath v. State of Punjab*, AIR 1967 SC 1643; see also *Keshavananda Bharati v. State of Kerala*, AIR 1973 SC 1461, *Nandini v. Dani*, AIR 1978 SC 1025.
11. *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union*, AIR 1984 SC 802, *D K Basu v. State of West Bengal*, AIR 1997 SC 610.
12. *Narendra Kumar v. State of Haryana*, 1994 SC 882, *Wadhwa v. Union of India*, AIR 1996 SC 2969, *Madhu Kishore v. Bihar*, AIR 1996 SC 1864.
13. *All India Statutory Corporation v. United Labour Union*, AIR 1997 SC 645.
14. *Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*, AIR 1986 SC 180, *UP Avas Avam Vikas Parishad v. Friends Cooperative Housing Society*, AIR 1996 SC 114.
15. *State of Punjab v. Mahindra Singh Chawla*, AIR 1997 SC 1225.
16. *M C Mehta v. Union*, AIR 1987 SC 1086, *Vellore Citizens Welfare Forum v. Union*, AIR 1996 SC 2715.
17. *Govind v. State of MP*, 1975 SC 1378.
18. *Husainara v. Home Secretary, State of Bihar*, AIR 1979 SC 1369, *Khatris v. State of Bihar*, AIR 1981 SC 928.
19. *Vishakha v. State of Rajasthan*, AIR 1997 SC 3011.
20. *Unnikrishnan v. State of AP*, AIR 1993 SC 2178.
21. *Francis Coralie Mullin v. Administrator, Union Territory of Delhi*, AIR 1981 SC 746.
22. Sir Henry Maine wrote: 'The movement of progressive societies has been uniform in one respect. Through all its course it has been distinguished by the gradual dissolution of family dependency, and the growth of individual obligation in its place. The Individual is steadily substituted for the Family, as the unit of which civil laws take account. The advance has been accomplished at varying rates of celerity, and there are societies not absolutely stationary in which collapse of the ancient organisation can only be perceived by careful study of the phenomena they present' (Henry S Maine, *Ancient Law* (London: J Murray, 1863), 168-9).
- According to Lloyd, 'Studies led Malinowski to the view that the basis of primitive law was "reciprocity", a notion bearing some resemblance to Deguit's "social solidarity". Thus by means of primitive "stop-list", a failure to comply with a man's economic obligation (e.g., to make a customary payment) would result in the economic support of the community being withheld from the defaulter, who would thus be left helpless and alone' (Lord Lloyd, *Introduction to Jurisprudence* (London: Stevens, 1972), 567).
23. N L Mitra and Vikram Raghavan, *Constitution of India and Business Law*, module 1 (Bangalore: National Law School, 1996), 22-35.
24. *Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum and others*, AIR 2006 SC 1367.
25. *Arya Samaj Education Trust, Delhi and others v. Director of Education, Delhi Administration and others*, AIR 1976 DEL 207.
26. *Brahmachari Siddheshwar Bhai and others v. State of West Bengal*, AIR 1995 SC 2089.
27. *DAV College, Bhatinda v. State of Punjab*, AIR 1971 SC 1731.
28. *Bal Patil and another v. Union*, AIR 2005 SC 3172.





# Varanasi: The Home of Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service

Swami Varishthananda

**V**ARANASI holds a unique place in the Indian religious consciousness. In the Sana-tana Dharma, all principles and practices which lead the human soul from its predominantly animal consciousness through human consciousness to divine consciousness have been accepted as valid and true. However, from time to time great saints, sages, and savants have come to propagate *yuga dharma*—that particular part of philosophy and practice especially conducive to spiritual growth in a particular time. Varanasi is the crucible in which such teachings must be tried and tested before they can be accepted by the world at large. This is an age-old tradition, known since the days of Maharshi Veda Vyasa and Bhagavan Buddha, who promulgated Vedanta and Buddhism from here, and continued in medieval times by Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, and Vallabhacharya, who carried out philosophical disputations in Varanasi, establishing as valid their points of view, and writing their treatises. In modern times too, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and others did the same in this city of Varanasi. The Ramakrishna movement is no exception, and that the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service—which has played a pioneering role in working out the spirit of this movement—has its home in Varanasi is no accident.

## Origin of the Philosophy of Service

But to begin from the beginning, let us narrate a very pertinent incident from the life of Sri Ramakrishna. At the time of his pilgrimage to Kashi with Mathur Babu, when passing through a village near Vaidyanath, Sri Ramakrishna was struck by the poverty and misery of the villagers. He told Math-

ur, ‘You are but a manager of the Mother’s estate. Give these people sufficient oil to cool their heads and each a piece of cloth to wear and feed them to their fill once.’ At first Mathur was a little hesitant and said, ‘Father, the pilgrimage will require much money, and the poor are too many. I may later be in want of money if I begin to do all that. What do you advise under these circumstances?’ To this the all-knowing and all-loving Master replied, ‘You rascal, I will not go to your Kashi. I will remain here with them; they have none to call their own; I will not leave them behind and go.’ True to his words, he went and sat in their midst. Mathur relented; he ordered cloth from Calcutta and did as the Master bade him. Beside himself with joy to see the villagers happy, the Master bade goodbye to them and gladly resumed his journey to Kashi with Mathur. In this way Sri Ramakrishna corroborated and reiterated the teachings of the Bhagavata:

यो मां सर्वेषु भूतेषु सन्तमात्मानमीश्वरम् ।

हित्वाचां भजते मौढ्याद्भस्मन्येव जुहोति सः ॥

If one disregards Me present in all as their soul and Lord but ignorantly offers worship only to images, such worship is as ineffective as sacrificial offerings made in ashes.

अथ मां सर्वभूतेषु भूतात्मानं कृतालम् ।

अहंयैदानमानाभ्यां मैत्र्याभिन्नेन चक्षुषा ॥

Therefore, (overcoming the separateness of a self-centred life) one should worship all beings with gifts, honour, and love, recognizing that such service is really being rendered to Me who resides in all beings as their innermost soul.

True to this spirit of worship of God in human beings, Sri Ramakrishna, like a *kalpataru* or wish-fulfilling tree, got Mathur to fulfil the needs of those who came to him!



**Lakshmi Nivas:**  
**Holy Mother**  
**stayed here from**  
**5 November 1912**  
**to 16 January 1913**

On his visit to Varanasi, Sri Ramakrishna discovered the ‘how’ of the age-old Hindu belief that death in Varanasi gives liberation. The pilgrims took a boat ride on the Ganga. As the boat neared the Manikarnika Ghat, Sri Ramakrishna went into samadhi and saw Lord Vishwanatha himself whispering the supreme *taraka mantra* in the ear of the jivas from one side of the funeral pyre, and the Mother of the Universe removing the bondages of the soul and freeing it from the cycle of transmigratory existence from the other side. In modern times, the discovery of the ‘how’ of things has been the pursuit of science—and Sri Ramakrishna was a spiritual scientist without parallel.

Though not much is known of Sri Ramakrishna’s first visit to Varanasi, the year of his visit is very significant: it was in 1863, the year in which Biley—Vireshwara, Narendra—the Shiva-avatara Swami Vivekananda was born! Sri Ramakrishna himself narrated that he had brought Naren from the realm beyond the junction of the divisible and indivisible. Both he and Swami Vivekananda were born from that Indivisible Spirit for the good of the world in this age—one a form without a voice, the other a voice without a form! Again, Swami Vivekananda’s mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi propitiated Vireshwara Shiva in Varanasi for a son,

through an aunt. Many were her prayers and fasts ... and then she was blessed with the vision of Lord Shiva, rousing himself from meditation and taking the form of a male child who was to be born to her.

### **Swami Vivekananda and Varanasi**

Swami Vivekananda had a deep and ardent devotion to Vishwanatha and to Varanasi, which is revealed in his numerous utterances and writings on as well as his few visits to Varanasi. Swamiji’s visits to Varanasi are particularly memorable. Here occurred that famous incident, between Sankata Mochana and Durga Kunda: Swamiji was being chased by a group of monkeys, but was unable to escape from them, when an old monk called out to him, ‘Face the brutes!’ Swamiji did just that, and the monkeys beat a hasty retreat, revealing to him the life-long lesson of boldly facing the brute. It was to Sri Pramadas Mitra, the reputed scholar of Kashi, that Swamiji looked for answers to various scriptural questions during his Baranagar monastery days in the 1880s. He also shared with him his Master’s teachings and hoped that Pramadas Babu would help him acquire funds for his Master’s memorial in Bengal. Unfortunately, Pramadas Babu did not approve of Swamiji’s efforts. Subsequently, on his penultimate visit to Varanasi in 1890, Swamiji famously declared, ‘I am now leaving Kashi, and shall not return until I have burst on society like a bomb-shell; and it will follow me like a dog.’

Swamiji last visited Varanasi in 1902, after his second visit to the West. In that second visit to the West, Swamiji—the voice without a form—gave his message with no holds barred: a message of the glory of the Spirit! Human glory! ‘Tomorrow night I shall lecture on “The Mind: Its Powers and Possibilities”’, he would announce, ‘Come to hear me. I have something to say to you, I shall do a little bomb-throwing. ... Come on! It will do you good.’ And what bombshells: ‘You are the Personal God. Just now I am worshipping you. This is the greatest prayer. Worship the whole world in that

sense—by serving it.’ While Swamiji was delivering his uncompromising message in the West, a group of youngsters inspired by his poem ‘To a Friend’ started the Poor Men’s Relief Association—a medical institution to serve the sick and the afflicted, especially the socio-economically disadvantaged—in Varanasi.

When Swamiji visited Varanasi in 1902, he was very pleased to see that these youngsters, inspired by his life and message, had started serving the sick in the true spirit, in right earnest. However, when he heard the name they had given their association—Poor Men’s Relief Association—he told them, ‘Let service and not compassion be your guiding principle. Transform your work into worship by looking upon all beings as manifestations of the Divine. No one but God can relieve the miseries of jivas. Who are you to conduct poor men’s relief? ... Name your organization The Home of Service—Sevashrama.’ In doing so, Swamiji was reiterating his Master’s words: ‘Who are you to show compassion? No, it cannot be. Not compassion for others, but rather the service of man, recognizing him to be a veritable manifestation of God.’ Later, when the institution became affiliated with the Ramakrishna Mission it came to be called the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service. In renaming this institution—which enshrined his message—Swamiji clearly enunciated his philosophy and ethos.

### **Sri Sarada Devi**

The final stamp of approval on this legacy of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda, on this *yuga dharma*, came as usual from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. Holy Mother visited Varanasi thrice. She visited first in September 1886, on her way to Vrindavan, like any other Hindu widow of her time, to assuage her grief at her separation from Sri Ramakrishna. One day, during the evening services of Vishwanatha, ‘her spiritual fervour was so highly kindled that unconscious what she was doing she walked to her dwelling place with unusually heavy steps. Questioned about it she exclaimed, “The Master had led me by hand from the temple.”’ Some devotees believe that



*Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi, in 1936*

during her second visit in 1895, she experienced first-hand that Sri Ramakrishna was none other than Baba Vishwanatha.

Holy Mother last visited Varanasi in November 1912, staying two months. Swami Gambhirananda describes that visit:

The very next day Mother went to visit the deities Vishwanatha and Annapurna in a palanquin. On the day following the worship of Kali (i.e., November 9), she visited the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, where Swamis Brahmananda, Shivananda, and Turiyananda, Charu Babu (Swami Shubhananda), Dr Kanjilal, and others were present. Kedar-baba (Swami Achalananda) accompanied her palanquin and showed her round. When she had seen every department, she sat down and in the course of a conversation with Kedar-baba expressed great delight at all the houses, gardens, etc., she had seen, and the good management she had noticed. She further added, ‘The Master himself is present here and Mother Lakshmi is here in all her majesty.’ Then she wanted to know how the institution took shape and with whom the idea first originated. After hearing and seeing all about the institution she remarked, ‘The place is so fine that I feel like staying on in Banaras.’ Soon after she had reached her residence, somebody came with a ten-rupee note and handing it over to the head said, ‘Kindly accept these ten rupees as the Mother’s donation to the Sevashrama.’ That note is still treasured there as an invaluable asset.

That day a devotee asked the Mother at her residence, ‘Mother, how did you find the Sevashrama?’ She said calmly, ‘I saw the Master himself present there, and that is why this work goes on here. These are all his work.’

Armed with this view of the Mother, Swami Brahmananda, when he saw Master Mahashaya (M, the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) coming that way, sent some devotees and brahmacharins to ask him, 'Mother has said that the Sevashrama is the Master's work, and that the Master himself is present there. Now what do you say to that?' Though Master Mahashaya was known to believe that it was contrary to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to engage in social service without first realizing God through spiritual disciplines like japa, meditation, and austerity, he smiled broadly and said, 'It can no longer be denied.' The *sangha janani*—the Mother of the sangha, of the whole Ramakrishna movement—thus put her stamp of authority on this *yuga dharma*.

### Swami Brahmananda

Swami Brahmananda, who took over the reins of the Ramakrishna Mission from Swamiji, also loved Varanasi and the Home of Service and took personal interest in the construction of permanent buildings at the sevashrama. This work of construction was entrusted by him to another direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vijnanananda.

An incident revealing his wonderful leadership may be mentioned here. At one time, there was some trouble among the monastic brothers of the two ashramas in Varanasi, especially in the sevashrama. Swami Saradananda, the general secretary of the Order, after personally investigating the matter, wrote to Swami Brahmananda that some of

those boys were unfit for monastic life and ought to be expelled. But Swami Brahmananda forbade any action, and himself came to the sevashrama to set things right. How did he do it? Simply by requesting all to meditate in his presence and instructing them without making any distinction between the good and the bad. He resolved the entire issue by raising the consciousness of all concerned to a higher level!

As president of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, he too unambiguously declared, like Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji: 'Those of you who are working in the hospital will also be able to reach the goal and realize the Reality through the practice of pure, unselfish work.' Again:

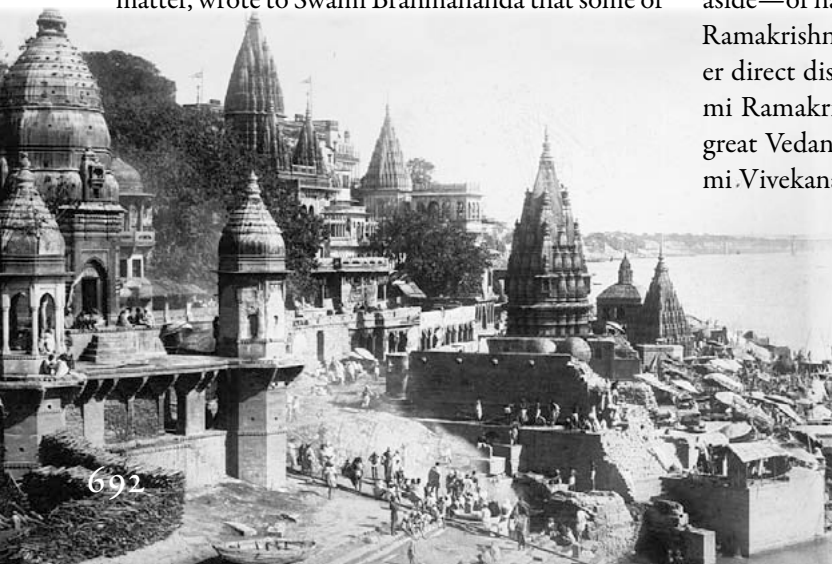
True it is that in all creatures He dwells, but His greater manifestation is in man. That is why Swamiji encouraged us to serve mankind. One must have faith that the one Brahman is in man, woman, and all creatures; and with that faith one must learn to serve Shiva in the form of jiva. As you practise this, suddenly one day the veil will be lifted and you will see that it is He who has become everything—man and universe. ... You are that all-pervading Shiva; and thus can serve Shiva in the form of jiva.

It was also at the Varanasi Sevashrama that Swami Brahmananda recognized Sri Mahavira Hanuman attending the Rama-nama sankirtana.

### Varanasi: City of Seva

Varanasi has the unique distinction—Kolkata aside—of having been visited and sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swamiji, and all other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna except Swami Ramakrishnananda. Swami Turiyananda, the great Vedantic monk and brother disciple of Swami Vivekananda, stayed at the sevashrama for the

Varanasi, early twentieth century





*The Sevashrama, then and now: B K Paul Memorial Operation Theatre, top left, the new hospital building, lower left, and bust of Swami Shubhananda, one of the Sevashrama pioneers*

last three and a half years of his life, from February 1919, and guided the monastic brothers in their spiritual path through scriptural classes and *satsanga*. One day he proclaimed: 'Remember that in this Sevashrama it is not hospital work, nursing a few patients, that is done; it is worship—worship of the Lord Himself. Have faith in the words of Swamiji who was like Shiva. Let your work in the Sevashrama be worship, and you will attain liberation. ... Work done in the spirit of worship is the only suitable spiritual discipline for this age.' He used to say, 'If even for three days you serve in the right spirit, that is to say, as worship, you will have the vision of the Lord. Those who work in this manner realize this truth in the depths of their being.'

Every year, on the Sunday following Swami Vivekananda's birthday celebrations, Narayana puja and seva are conducted. In the morning, even as the worship of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda is performed in the temple, the monks and brahmacharins of the sevashrama go round the hospital and worship each and every patient with offerings of flowers, incense, and fruits and sweets, as also by touching their feet, amidst the chanting of Purusha Sukta, Narayana Sukta, and Vedic shanti mantras, to keep the ideal of serv-

ice as worship burning bright in their minds.

The Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi, truly embodies the spirit of the present age, the spirit of Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda and the spirit of this ancient land of Shiva. Vyasa-deva has beautifully captured this spirit in his 'Shiva Manasa Puja':

आत्मा त्वं गिरिजा मतिः सहचराः प्राणाः शरीरं गृहं  
पूजा ते विषयोपभोगरचना निद्रा समाधिस्थितिः ।  
सञ्चारः पदयोः प्रदक्षिणविधिः स्तोत्राणि सर्वा गिरो  
यद्यत्कर्म करोमि तत्तदखिलं शम्भो तवाराधनम् ॥

O Shiva, you are my soul, the Divine Mother my intellect; my *pranas* are your attendants, my body your temple, its sense-enjoyments your puja, and my sleep, samadhi. Wherever I walk, I am circumambulating you; all my words are hymns to your glory, and whatever work I perform is your worship, O Shambhu!

The Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, which serves Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, agnostics, and atheists alike, is a living embodiment of the following verses of Swamiji's poem—the poem which inspired the founding of the sevashrama and which vividly captures the spirit of the Ramakrishna movement:

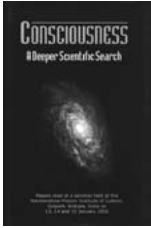
From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,  
And to the very minutest atom,  
Everywhere is the same God, the All-Love;  
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.

These are His manifold forms before thee,  
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God?  
Who loves all beings without distinction,  
He indeed is worshipping best his God.



# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



## **Consciousness: A Deeper Scientific Search**

Eds. Jonathan Shear,  
S P Mukherjee

Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture,  
Gol Park, Kolkata 700 029. E-mail: [rmic@vsnl.com](mailto:rmic@vsnl.com). 2006. x + 538 pp.  
Rs 200.

Despite the ongoing 'meaningful dialogue' between spiritual scientists or experientialists and physical scientists or experimentalists all over the world, the riddle of consciousness has defied an unambiguous solution till date. It is perhaps destined to be so for the simple reason that philosophers and scientists can discuss consciousness only within the realm of duality or maya. Therefore, they have not been able to give a precise description of consciousness which not only permeates the visible universe but also transcends it. According to Vedanta, the objects of the phenomenal world are like small whirlpools in the infinite ocean of consciousness; they appear for a while only to disappear, and reappear again; and the process goes on for ever. But the problem remains: How does one consciousness appear as many?

Twenty-two renowned scientists and scholars, including representatives of the major religions of the world—Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—have made a very bold attempt to answer this and many other related questions about the nature and location of consciousness, through their presentations and discussions at a seminar held at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, from 13 to 15 January 2006, the proceedings of which are presented in the book under review. This seminar is the third in the series of international seminars dealing with the theme of consciousness organized by the Institute; the earlier two being 'Philosophy and Science: An Explanatory Approach to Consciousness' and 'Life, Mind and Consciousness' held in February 2002 and January 2004 respectively.

Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche, Chairman of the Central Tibetan Administration of the Dalai Lama, has rightly raised a doubt whether consciousness—which is completely different from matter—can at all be scientifically researched. He equates consciousness with the realization of *shunyata*, which is the central theme of Buddhism. His concern is shared by Prof. M G K Menon, who suggests that higher levels of consciousness should be scientifically investigated to the extent possible using time-tested methods.

The book gives vivid descriptions of the personal experiences of the experientialists as well as experimental details of the experimentalists in connection with consciousness. The panel discussions that follow the presentations reveal both the questioners and the panelists at their best. At the end of the seminar the following points emerge: (i) Consciousness is all-pervasive. It is non-dual. (ii) It constitutes the foundation of all value and all knowledge. (iii) It is ineffable. It is an experience of 'wonder'. (iv) Modern science, especially quantum mechanics and neurobiology, can provide only some useful hints about the nature and seat of consciousness. For example, when consciousness shines on the substrate—metal or plant or animal or human—the degree of reflection would vary depending on the substrate. It is least reflected in the mineral kingdom, and fully reflected in a Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The experiments conducted by Prof. J C Bose, and later the well-known double-slit experiment conducted with the help of the electron gun, are also suggestive of the all-pervasive nature of consciousness.

Swami Prabhananda forces the reader to ponder over not only the mysterious vastness of the universe but also the mystery of humanity. The book is interesting, inspiring, and useful for the general reader as well.

*Dr S C Goswami*

Former Reader in Chemistry  
Dayal Singh College, New Delhi



## **Aṣṭāṅga Nighaṇṭu**

Ed. P V Sharma;

Trans. K S Viswanatha Sarma

Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute,  
Chennai 600 004. 2004. xxxvi + 140 pp.  
Rs 180.

The works of the three great masters—Charaka, Sushruta, and Vagbhata—constitute the foundational literature of Ayurveda, the greater triad or *brihatrayi*. Amongst the various types of literature that emerged in the later part of the tradition, the lexicons on drug sources, the *nighantus*, deserve special mention. *Dhanvantari Nighantu*, *Madanapala Nighantu*, *Sodhala Nighantu*, and *Kayyadeva Nighantu* are some of the early and important *nighantus* that attempted to systematize the nomenclature and summarize the properties and actions of the various drugs used in Ayurveda. It is precisely the absence of such an organized reference to the drugs mentioned in the classical texts of Ayurveda that make the *nighantu* a valuable source of information for better understanding of the Ayurvedic pharmacopoeia.

Though *nighantus* have sometimes added to the confusion when it comes to identification of drugs with multiple synonyms, they remain the only available tools to rediscover the lost identity of the drug sources codified in Ayurvedic literature. The *Aṣṭāṅga Nighantu* attributed to Vahata (who may not be the Vagbhata who authored *Ashtanga Sangraha*) is a very early attempt in the *nighantu* tradition to compile the synonyms of drugs in a comprehensive way, so as to enable correction identification for use in formulations.

The work under review is a second, revised and enlarged edition; the first edition came out in 1973. Credit goes to Prof. Priyavrat Sharma for having painstakingly worked on three manuscripts of the *Aṣṭāṅga Nighantu* in the 1970s and for publishing a critical edition of the text. His original introduction has been included in this edition, and still appeals as a penetrating and critical overview of the contents of the work. Dr K S Viswanatha Sarma has critically edited the second edition and provided transliterations in English and Tamil equivalents for the Sanskrit names of the plants. The second edition is much more reader friendly compared to the first, and the formatting is impressive. The original text has been well-checked for consistency and typesetting errors rectified. It goes without saying that academicians

and serious practitioners of Ayurveda will warmly welcome the second edition of the work.

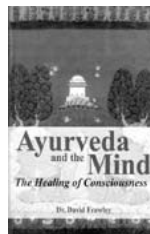
Nevertheless, the work cannot be considered as exhaustive, and there is room for improvement in many areas. The English and Tamil additions to the book comprise, in the main, only transliteration of Sanskrit terms and cannot be called translations—especially the English. Equivalent English names of the drugs mentioned in Sanskrit have not been given, and the absence of botanical names is very likely to disappoint modern scholars of Ayurveda. It would have added great value to the book if scientific names in the binomial nomenclature were appended to the work. Another glaring omission is the absence of an index to the Sanskrit and Tamil names used in the work, which will hamper effective access of information contained in the book by scholars who are not proficient in Sanskrit.

In spite of the book's few shortcomings, the initiative of the Kuppuswami Sastri Research Institute is indeed laudable in making *Aṣṭāṅga Nighantu* accessible to scholarship. With only a fraction of Ayurvedic manuscripts having been published so far, such moves are certainly great steps forward in rediscovering ancient wisdom for the modern world; and all the more so because traditional knowledge systems like Ayurveda are poised to make a global resurgence in our times.

Dr P Ram Manohar

Director of Research

Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore



## **Ayurveda and the Mind**

Dr David Frawley

Motilal Banarsidass, 41 U A Bungalow  
Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 007.  
E-mail: [mlbd@vsnl.com](mailto:mlbd@vsnl.com). 2006. 346 pp.  
Rs 250.

This book has been planned in four parts: (i) Ayurvedic psychology or yogic mind-body medicine; (ii) The energetics of consciousness; (iii) Ayurvedic therapies for the mind; (iv) Spiritual applications of Ayurvedic psychology: the paths of yoga. What all these four parts discuss is 'personality'. But 'personality' is a multi-valent, subtle, and exotic term whose meaning has eluded some of the finest psychologists of the past. Dr Frawley's is an interesting, thought-provoking, and highly readable account of what the Indian system of Ayurveda has to say about 'personality'.

That Ayurveda classifies constitutional types as



*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha* is well known; but what this means is not often clear to the modern reader. A statement like 'Vata governs movement and is responsible for the discharge of all impurities both voluntary and involuntary' is crisp, clear, and readable. The same can be said about the three *gunas*. Not many know that *sattva* is intelligence and imparts balance, *rajas* is energy and causes imbalance, and *tamas* is substance and creates inertia. Dr Frawley has explained the Ayurvedic concepts and terms in the contemporary idiom—and there lies his credit.

As this book is mainly a guide to healing, it dwells at some length on etiology and treatment from the Ayurvedic viewpoint. The all-important role of *ahara* (diet) is well discussed. *Ahara* is not merely what we chew and eat but whatever we incorporate through our senses. This concept comes very near to the psychoanalytic concept of introjection/incorporation/internalization. The book also has an interesting chapter on mantras. Mantra is a well-known word with an ill-known meaning. Anybody studying this book will get a clear idea of what mantra is and how it can affect our health, for better or for worse. Last, but not least, is Dr Frawley's explanation of *ashtanga-sadhana*, the eight-fold practice of Raja Yoga. The concept of 'meditation' has been described with characteristic clarity.

Dr Frawley has given us another valuable book. One word of caution, though: The book discusses many ideas, and the reader has to proceed carefully and slowly. This volume needs to be read with both head and heart.

*Prof. Somnath Bhattacharyya*

Former Head, Department of Psychology  
Calcutta University



### **A Concise Introduction to Indian Medicine**

Guy Mazars; trans. T K Gopalan

Motilal Banarsidass. 2006. xii + 115 pp.  
Rs 395.

This book, a translation of the original French edition, is a surprise package. Ayurvedic medicine and therapeutics have made inroads in France, Germany, Italy, and the US. The patients using them are often not aware of the origin and rationality of Ayurveda, which draws upon the systematic wisdom of several millennia. Within a short compass, the book deals admirably with the origin, methodology, and therapeutics of Ayurveda, from Vedic times to the eighteenth century—when its development was stalled by the inroads of Western medicine.

ry—when its development was stalled by the inroads of Western medicine.

The book summarizes the extent and influence of Ayurvedic medicine on ancient Sumerian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman medicine. Buddhist physicians like Nagarjuna and Jivaka built upon the medical knowledge found in the Rig Veda, Atharva Veda, *Charaka Samhita*, and *Sushruta Samhita*. Arab physicians picked up many Ayurvedic concepts through translations—both in Persian and Arabic—of Ayurvedic treatises. In medieval times, Graeco-Arabic medicine, called Unani, became popular in India. The development of both Unani and Siddha systems of medicine in India owed a lot to Ayurveda. There was a continuous exchange of ideas among physicians in India, and history tells us of regular conferences and workshops. Finally the cosmology and world-view that guided Ayurveda to develop an eco-friendly medical system was accepted by all these disciplines with minor modifications. Such egalitarian exchanges produced a civilization that withstood the rigours of political change, a fact that we seem to have forgotten under pressure of Western education.

*Dr Saibal Gupta*

Former Head, Dept of Cardiothoracic Surgery  
National Medical College, Kolkata



### **The Sterling Book of Hinduism**

Dr Karan Singh

New Dawn Press, A 59 Okhla Industrial Area, Phase II, New Delhi 110 020. E-mail: [info@sterlingpublishers.com](mailto:info@sterlingpublishers.com). 2005. 99 pp. Rs 99.

To present Hinduism within the compass of a hundred pages of a pocket-sized book with a spacious layout is a demanding task. If Dr Karan Singh has done exactly this, it is because he is eminently qualified to do so. To trace the source of Hinduism to the hymnal tradition of the Vedas, to elucidate its foundational concepts—Brahman, Atman, and their identity; karma and cyclical time; the fourfold yogas, purusharthas, varnas and ashramas—and then to trace its historical progress through classical and medieval times to the modern traditions of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Aurobindo, and Ramana Maharshi is no mean achievement.

If you need an introduction to or a synoptic overview of Hinduism, this book is for you.

*PB*

# REPORTS

## Durga Puja

Durga Puja, the autumnal worship of the Divine Mother, was celebrated at Belur Math from 18 to 21 October 2007 with all solemnity. The weather was fine on all the days, except for light rains on the Saptami day. About 80,000 devotees were served with cooked prasad. The Kumari Puja performed on 19 October drew huge crowds, and the Sandhi Puja in the small hours of 20 October was also attended by many devotees. There was a live telecast of the puja by Kolkata Doordarshan at different times on all the days. A detailed discussion of the puja as well as a photo gallery and video clippings of the celebrations were presented on the Belur Math website ([www.belurmath.org](http://www.belurmath.org)).

The following 25 centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission also performed Durga Puja: Antpur, Asansol, Barasat, Contai, Cooch Behar, Dhaleswar (under Agartala), Ghatshila, Guwahati, Jalpaiguri, Jamshedpur, Jayrambati, Kamarpukur, Karinganj, Lucknow, Malda, Manasdwip, Medinipur, Mumbai, Patna, Port Blair, Rahara, Shella (under Cherrapunji), Shillong, Silchar, and Varanasi Advaita Ashrama.

## Achievement

Shubhajit Dasgupta, a class-9 student of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar**, won the first prize in the All India National Science Seminar on *Global Climate Change and Its Impact* organized by the National Council of Science Museums at New Delhi on 5 October. The prize carries a monthly scholarship of Rs 1,000 for two years.

## News from Branch Centres

On 2 October, **Ramakrishna Mission, Agartala**, organized a seminar on blood donation, which was inaugurated by Sri Manik Sarkar, Chief Minister of

*Durga Puja at Belur Math: Kumari Puja—the Divine Mother worshipped in a young girl; the purnahuti, in which all one's actions are offered to the Supreme; devotees with prasad; and after the immersion, invoking peace through 'Shantijala' (from top)*



Tripura. The seminar was followed by a blood donation camp in which 74 persons donated blood.



Prizewinners,  
Sri Sarada  
Jnana Sudha

## Relief

Torrential rains towards the end of September caused extensive flooding in Kolkata and several other parts of West Bengal. Centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission immediately undertook relief work in flood-affected areas; details of relief materials distributed follow:

**West Bengal · Antpur:** 31,245 kg chira, 2,450 kg sugar, and 300,000 halogen tablets to 53,358 persons belonging to 36 villages of Jangipara, Khanakul I and II, and Pursura blocks in Hooghly district and Udaynarayanpur block in Howrah district; **Baranagar Mission:** 510 kg chira and 100 kg sugar to 851 persons, and 466 shirts, 466 pants, 150 dhotis, 33 lungis, 210 saris, 145 salwars, 346 frocks, and 125 blankets to 1,475 persons of three nearby communities; **Barasat:** milk made with 48 kg milk powder to 304 persons of four colonies in Barasat Municipality, North 24-Parganas district; **Cooch Behar:** 262 shirts, 282 pants, 9 dhotis, 55 vests, 37 blouses, 118 saris, 37 dupattas, 214 frocks, 49 woollen garments, and 5 bedcovers to 1,076 persons belonging to 5 villages of Tufanganj and Mathabhanga subdivisions; **Ichapur:** 62,813 kg chira, 5,000 kg sugar, and 750 kg bleaching powder to 113,055 persons belonging to 59 villages of Khanakul I block in Hooghly district and Ghatal and Daspur II blocks in West Medinipur district; **Rahara:** cooked food (khichri and curry), 150 kg chira, 60 kg sugar, 1,870 loaves of bread, 3,500 kg rice, 400 kg dal, 173 kg milk powder, 138 kg biscuits, 8,650 1-litre pouches of drinking water, and 122,000 halogen tablets to 4,696 families belonging to Rahara, Khardah, Sodepur, and Panihati in North 24-Parganas district and Kalaighata area and Ranaghat I block in Nadia district; **Saradapitha:** cooked food (khichri) to 58,500 persons, and 5,050 kg chira, 400 kg sugar, and 80 kg milk powder to 15,300 persons of Amta II block in Howrah district.

**Bangladesh · Baliati:** 3,075 kg rice and 307 kg dal to 615 flood-affected families of Manikganj district in the months of August and September.

**Distress Relief ·** The following centres distributed various items to poor and needy persons of nearby areas:

**Agartala:** 450 saris, 200 dhotis, and 400 children's garments; **Bankura:** 500 saris and 200 school uniforms; **Cherrapunjee:** 400 garments; **Garbeta:** 255 saris, 20 dhotis, 30 lungis, 20 vests, and 75 school uniforms; **Karimganj:** 128 dhotis and 315 saris. ❧

**Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia,** organized a three-day function from 10 to 12 October to mark the first phase of its golden jubilee celebrations. Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the function, which was attended by about 2,000 persons, including students, teachers, monastics, and devotees. Sri Chittatosh Mukhopadhyay, former Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Prof. Asish Kumar Banerjee, Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University, and some other distinguished persons addressed the gathering.

The Vidyapith was founded in 1958 at the request of Dr B C Roy, then Chief Minister of West Bengal, with a roll of 38 class-9 students. Today, the Vidyapith comprises a residential higher secondary school with 740 students.

## Sri Sarada Jnana Sudha

Sri Sarada Jnana Sudha, the annual written quiz competition conducted by Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, since 2004 for students of classes 7–12 from schools all over Karnataka, had its 2007 awards ceremony on 14 October at the ashrama. Chief guest Sri Bhaskara Rao, Commissioner of Police, Mysore, distributed the top prizes. Nearly 110,000 students from 651 schools enrolled, and 68,000 answer sheets were received, which were evaluated in four stages to select the six top prizewinners. Prizes were also awarded to highest participating schools, and 3,327 special prizes were awarded to the best 5 per cent of students from every school. The subjects of this year's competition were *vidyarthi lakshana*, characteristics of a student, for classes 7–10, and *vyaktitva nirmana*, personality development, for classes 11–12. In previous years, participants were quizzed on the lives and teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Ramakrishna.



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
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## Title Index

### **A**

Aghore Kamini Devi—A Pioneer in Women's Emancipation — <i>Dr Sudeshna Basak</i> ... ..	284
Ahimsa and Hinduism — <i>A P N Pankaj</i> ... ..	668
All-inclusive View of the Vedic Seers — <i>Swami Tattwavidananda</i> ... ..	23
Anger, Managing — <i>Swami Atmavikasananda</i> ... ..	330

### **B**

<i>Bijaganita</i> of Bhaskaracharya — <i>Dr Amartya Kumar Dutta</i> ... ..	545
Brief History of Indian Mathematics, A — <i>Prof. Vijaya Kumar Murty</i> ... ..	517
Buddha Path, Walking the — <i>Dr Dipak Sengupta</i> ... ..	569, 636
Buddhism: the Dawn of a New Era, Women in — <i>B N Neelima</i> ... ..	277

### **C**

China, A Visit to — <i>Swami Smaranananda</i> ... ..	672
Christian Contemplative Tradition, Knowledge, Love, and Union: A Glimpse into the — <i>Father Paul of Jesus</i> ... ..	128
Contemplating the Theravada Tradition — <i>Ajahn Amaro</i> ... ..	113
Contemplation, Fruits of — <i>Swami Brahmeshananda</i> ... ..	417
Contemplation, Worship and — <i>Swami Sarvadevananda</i> ... ..	63
Contemplation in an Active World — <i>Swami Smaranananda</i> ... ..	12
Contemplation in the Upanishads — <i>Swami Atmajnanananda</i> ... ..	34
Contemplation on Om, the Gayatri, and the <i>Mahāvākyas</i> — <i>Swami Mukhyananda</i> ... ..	29
Contemplation: Some Reflections, Fruits of — <i>Swami Bhaskarananda</i> ... ..	83
Contemplative Life, Obstacles in — <i>Swami Brahmeshananda</i> ... ..	76
Contemplative Life, Prayer in — <i>Swami Amarananda</i> ... ..	57
Contemplative Life, Preparations for the — <i>Swami Gokulananda</i> ... ..	45
Contemplative Life, Some Thoughts on the — <i>Vimala Thakar</i> ... ..	139
Contemplative Life, The — <i>Swami Atmasthananda</i> ... ..	8
Contemplative Life and Psychopathology, The — <i>Dr Alan Roland</i> ... ..	150
Contemplative Mind, The — <i>Prof. Somnath Bhattacharyya</i> ... ..	140

Contemplative Practices in Śaivism — <i>Swami Tadananda</i> ... ..	102
Contemplative Spirituality in Islam — <i>Maulana Wahiduddin Khan</i> ... ..	133
Contemplative Tradition in the Ramakrishna Order, The — <i>Swami Prabhananda</i> ... ..	15
Contemplative Tradition, Knowledge, Love, and Union: A Glimpse into the Christian — <i>Father Paul of Jesus...</i> ... ..	128
Contemplative Tradition, The Jain — <i>Acharya Mahaprajna</i> ... ..	109
Contemplative Tradition, The Śākta — <i>Swami Vimalatmananda</i> ... ..	95
Contemplative Tradition, The Vaiṣṇava — <i>Swami Purnananda</i> ... ..	87
Cosmic Shakti in Action, The — <i>Sudesh</i> ... ..	226
Cosmos in Western and Indian Thought, The — <i>Swami Durgananda</i> ... ..	483, 536
Creating Cultural Harmony: The Spiritual Path of the Heart — <i>Linda Longmire...</i> ... ..	421
Creativity: A Paradox between Method and Madness — <i>Pritha Lal</i> ... ..	324

## D

Devi: Sri Sarada — <i>Devadatta Kali</i> ... ..	268
---	-----

## E

### Editorials

Contemplative Mood, The ... ..	4
Crucibles of Culture ... ..	557
Indian Intellectual Tradition, The ... ..	505
Minding Our Environment ... ..	361
Politics, History, and Swami Vivekananda ... ..	605
Practising Peace ... ..	409
Reflections on Philosophy ... ..	457
Religious Organization, The ... ..	313
Remembering Swami Vivekananda – I ... ..	169
Remembering Swami Vivekananda – II ... ..	217
Skilled Service ... ..	653
Worshipping Devi Saraswati ... ..	265
Education, and Swami Vivekananda, On Ethics, — <i>Prof. Bharati Ganguli</i> ... ..	192, 247
Ethics, Education, and Swami Vivekananda, On — <i>Prof. Bharati Ganguli</i> ... ..	192, 247
Ethics: Some Contemporary Views — <i>Dr M Sivaramkrishna</i> ... ..	477
Excellence, Quest for — <i>Swami Satyarupananda</i> ... ..	317

## F

Fruits of Contemplation — <i>Swami Brahmeshananda...</i> ... ..	417
Fruits of Contemplation: Some Reflections — <i>Swami Bhaskarananda</i> ... ..	83

## G

Gahananandaji Maharaj, Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami ... ..	facing 651
---	------------

## H

Hajj: Unity in Diversity, The — <i>Swami Gangananda...</i> ... ..	581
Harmony, Inner and Outer — <i>Swami Vedananda</i> ... ..	412
Harmony: The Spiritual Path of the Heart, Creating Cultural — <i>Linda Longmire</i> ... ..	421
Heart of Mahayana Buddhist Practice in the West, The — <i>Rev. Heng Sure</i> ... ..	120
Hinduism, Ahimsa and — <i>A P N Pankaj</i> ... ..	668
History, In Search of an 'Indian' Philosophy of — <i>Prof. Ganapathy Subbiah</i> ... ..	612
Household Waste Disposal and Urban Domestic Farming — <i>Swami Nirvikalpananda</i> ... ..	390

**I**

Islam, Contemplative Spirituality in —*Maulana Wahiduddin Khan* ... .. 133

**J**

Jain Contemplative Tradition, The —*Acharya Mahaprajna* ... .. 109

Japa: Instrument of Love for God's Name —*Swami Tathagatananda* ... .. 50

Jerusalem: Crossroads of History —*Dr Saibal Gupta* ... .. 575, 641

**K**

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Buddha Kanchi —*Dr Prema Nandakumar* ... .. 349

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Jina Kanchi —*Dr Prema Nandakumar* ... .. 398

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Shiva Kanchi —*Dr Prema Nandakumar* ... .. 444

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Vishnu Kanchi —*Dr Prema Nandakumar* ... .. 492

Knowledge, Love, and Union: A Glimpse into the Christian Contemplative Tradition

—*Father Paul of Jesus...* ... .. 128

**L**

Language in the Vaiyakarana Tradition, Philosophy of —*Dr Kapil Kapoor* ... .. 463, 530

*Lila Chintana* and *Lila Dhyana*, Meditation and Reflection on the Divine Play:

—*Swami Atmajnanananda* ... .. 70

Leader, The —*Swami Ishatmananda* ... .. 319

Leadership, Understanding —*Dr Vinayak Rao* ... .. 338

**M**

Madurai, the Legendary Temple City —*N Hariharan* ... .. 202, 251, 299

Mahasamadhi of Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj ... .. facing 651

Mahayana Buddhist Practice in the West, The Heart of —*Rev. Heng Sure* ... .. 120

Managing Anger —*Swami Atmavikasananda* ... .. 330

Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta, The —*Dr M Sivaramkrishna* ... .. 197, 541

Mathematics, A Brief History of Indian —*Prof. Vijaya Kumar Murty* ... .. 517

Mathematics, The Philosophy of —*Swami Sarvottamananda* ... .. 512, 590

Medicine at Crossroads —*Swami Brahmeshananda* ... .. 654

Medicine, Rethinking —*Prof. B M Hegde* ... .. 659

Meditation and Reflection on the Divine Play: *Lila Chintana* and *Lila Dhyana*

—*Swami Atmajnanananda* ... .. 70

Meditation and the Way of Yoga —*Swami Adiswarananda* ... .. 39

**N**

Neurophysiological and Psychoneural Aspects of Meditative Practices, The

—*Dr S Sulekha, Dr P N Ravindra, Dr T R Raju, and Dr Bindu Kutty* ... .. 146

**O**

Obstacles in Contemplative Life —*Swami Brahmeshananda* ... .. 76

Owl in Sanskrit Literature, *Uluka*—The —*Dr Suruchi Pande* ... .. 375

**P**

Perelman: The Madness of Knowledge, Grisha —*Br. Brahmachaitanya* ... .. 547

Philosophy and Aesthetics of Rasa, The —*Dr Makarand Paranjape* ... .. 524

Philosophy in the Twenty-first Century —*Prof. J N Mohanty* ... .. 459

Philosophy of History, In Search of an 'Indian' —*Prof. Ganapathy Subbiah* ... .. 612

Philosophy of Language in the Vaiyakarana Tradition — <i>Dr Kapil Kapoor</i> ... ..	463, 530
Philosophy of Mathematics, The — <i>Swami Sarvottamananda</i> ... ..	512, 590
Philosophy of Religion: From East to West and Back Again, The — <i>Dr Jeffery D Long</i> ... ..	469
Philosophy of the Physical Sciences — <i>Dr N Mukunda</i> ... ..	506, 584
Philosophy, Social Seismography in Indian Legal — <i>Dr N L Mitra</i> ... ..	616, 685
Political Philosophy: The Indian Perspective — <i>Prof. Ashok Chousalkar</i> ... ..	606
Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago	
Benares Ramakrishna Home of Service Annual Report ... ..	316
Child-Heart ... ..	558
Civilisation ... ..	362
Master as I Saw Him, The ... ..	171
Occasional Notes ... ..	458
Some of the Notable Utterances of the “National Week” ... ..	267
Sri Ramakrishna’s Teachings... ..	411
Two Poems ... ..	219
Visit to the Belur Math, A ... ..	6
Prayer in Contemplative Life — <i>Swami Amarananda</i> ... ..	57
Preparations for the Contemplative Life — <i>Swami Gokulananda</i> ... ..	45
Psychopathology, The Contemplative Life and — <i>Dr Alan Roland</i> ... ..	150

## Q

Quest for Excellence — <i>Swami Satyarupananda</i> ... ..	317
Quiet and Peaceful Life, A — <i>Janice Thorup</i> ... ..	380, 424

## R

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment	
— <i>Dr V V Subramanian, Dr T S Suryanarayanan, Dr V Sivasubramanian,</i> <i>Dr S Swaminathan, Dr K Kannan</i> ... ..	370, 434
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta, The Many-splendoured — <i>Dr M Sivaramkrishna</i> ... ..	197, 541
Ramakrishna, Reminiscences of Sri — <i>Ramendrasundar Bhattacharya</i> ... ..	488
Ramakrishna, Reminiscences of Sri — <i>Trailokyanath Dev</i> ... ..	597
Rammohan Roy: His Political Views, Raja — <i>Dr Bimal Kumar Roy</i> ... ..	625
Rasa, The Philosophy and Aesthetics of — <i>Dr Makarand Paranjape</i> ... ..	524
Relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s Religious Ideas in the 21st Century	
— <i>Dr C Venkata Madhava Reddy</i> ... ..	231
Religion: From East to West and Back Again, The Philosophy of — <i>Dr Jeffery D Long</i> ... ..	469
Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna — <i>Ramendrasundar Bhattacharya</i> ... ..	488
Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna — <i>Trailokyanath Dev</i> ... ..	597
Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda — <i>Mrs Alice M Hansbrough</i> ... ..	172, 241, 293, 343, 385, 438
Reports ... ..	165, 211, 261, 309, 356, 404, 452, 501, 553, 601, 649, 697
Rethinking Medicine — <i>Prof. B M Hegde</i> ... ..	659
Reviews ... ..	157, 208, 258, 306, 353, 401, 449, 497, 551, 598, 647, 694

## S

Śaivism, Contemplative Practices in — <i>Swami Tadananda</i> ... ..	102
Śākta Contemplative Tradition, The — <i>Swami Vimalatmananda</i> ... ..	95
Sanitation as a Movement: The RKM Lokasiksha Parishad Experience	
— <i>Swami Asaktananda and Chandi Charan Dey</i> ... ..	363, 429
Sarada, Devi: Sri — <i>Devadatta Kali</i> ... ..	268



Sarada Devi: the Eternal Value, Sri — <i>Dr Raj Lakshmi Varma</i> ... ..	274
Sikkim, Three Visits to — <i>Swami Smaranananda</i> ... ..	559
Signs of Hope: Countering Tsunami Effects through Natural Processes — <i>M Revathi</i> ... ..	393
Social Seismography in Indian Legal Philosophy — <i>Dr N L Mitra</i> ... ..	616, 685
Some Thoughts on the Contemplative Life — <i>Vimala Thakar</i> ... ..	139

## T

Tales from the Library — <i>Hiranyagarbha</i> ... ..	490
Thai Monk's Glorious Crusade, A — <i>N Karthikeyan</i> ... ..	679
Theravada Tradition, Contemplating the — <i>Ajahn Amaro</i> ... ..	113
This Month ... ..	2, 168, 216, 264, 312, 360, 408, 456, 504, 556, 604, 652,
Three Visits to Sikkim — <i>Swami Smaranananda</i> ... ..	559
Time Management: First Things First — <i>Swami Sarvapriyananda</i> ... ..	334
To Our Readers ... ..	2
Traditional Wisdom	
<i>Cintana</i> : Contemplation ... ..	I
<i>Darśana</i> : Philosophical Vision ... ..	455
In Praise of Swami Vivekananda ... ..	167
Invoking Devi Saraswati ... ..	263
Invoking the Supreme ... ..	215
<i>Mahābhūtāni</i> : The Elements ... ..	359
<i>Rājadharmā</i> : Governance ... ..	603
<i>Śānti</i> : Peace ... ..	407
<i>Svāsthya</i> : Health ... ..	651
The Axes of the Earth ... ..	555
The Scientific Spirit ... ..	503
Ways of the Wise ... ..	311
Tsunami Effects through Natural Processes, Signs of Hope: Countering — <i>M Revathi</i> ... ..	393

## U

<i>Ulūka</i> —The Owl in Sanskrit Literature — <i>Dr Suruchi Pande</i> ... ..	375
Unfolding Youthful Energies — <i>Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam</i> ... ..	186, 234
Understanding Leadership — <i>Dr Vinayak Rao</i> ... ..	338
Upanishads, Contemplation in the — <i>Swami Atmajnananda</i> ... ..	34

## V

Vaiṣṇava Contemplative Tradition, The — <i>Swami Purnananda</i> ... ..	87
Vanaprastha Ashrama for the Present Age — <i>Dr Pratima D Desai</i> ... ..	664
Varanasi: Home of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service — <i>Swami Varishthananda</i> ... ..	689
Varanasi: The City of Light — <i>Swami Varishthananda</i> ... ..	564
Varanasi: The City of Saints, Sages, and Savants — <i>Swami Varishthananda</i> ... ..	630
Vedic Seers, All-inclusive View of the — <i>Swami Tattwavidananda</i> ... ..	23
Visit to China, A — <i>Swami Smaranananda</i> ... ..	672
Vivekananda, On Ethics, Education, and Swami — <i>Prof. Bharati Ganguli</i> ... ..	192, 247
Vivekananda, Reminiscences of Swami — <i>Mrs Alice M Hansbrough</i> ... ..	172, 241, 293, 343, 385, 438
Vivekananda on the Economic Plight of India, Swami — <i>Dr Gordon R Stavig</i> ... ..	183
Vivekananda's Devotion to His Mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Swami — <i>Swami Tathagatananda</i> ... ..	220, 287
Vivekananda's Letters to Haridas Desai, Swami — <i>Dushyant Pandya</i> ... ..	178

## Vivekananda's Religious Ideas in the 21st Century, Relevance of Swami

—*Dr C Venkata Madhava Reddy* ... .. 231**W**Walking the Buddha Path —*Dr Dipak Sengupta*... .. 569, 636

Wilkins's Fundamental Contribution to Indology in the West, Sir Charles

—*Swami Tathagatananda* ... .. 620Women in Buddhism: the Dawn of a New Era —*B N Neelima* ... .. 277Women's Emancipation, Aghore Kamini Devi—A Pioneer in —*Dr Sudeshna Basak*... .. 284Worship and Contemplation —*Swami Sarvadevananda* ... .. 63**Author Index****A***Adiswarananda, Swami*

Meditation and the Way of Yoga ... .. 39

*Amarananda, Swami*

Prayer in Contemplative Life ... .. 57

*Amaro, Ajahn*

Contemplating the Theravada Tradition... .. 113

*Asaktananda, Swami*

Sanitation as a Movement: The RKM Lokasiksha Parishad Experience ... .. 363, 429

*Atmajnanananda, Swami*Meditation and Reflection on the Divine Play: *Lila Chintana* and *Lila Dhyana* ... .. 70*Atmajnanananda, Swami*

Contemplation in the Upanishads ... .. 34

*Atmasthananda, Swami*

The Contemplative Life ... .. 8

*Atmavikasananda, Swami*

Managing Anger ... .. 330

**B***Basak, Dr Sudeshna*

Aghore Kamini Devi—A Pioneer in Women's Emancipation ... .. 284

*Bhaskarananda, Swami*

Fruits of Contemplation: Some Reflections ... .. 83

*Bhattacharya, Ramendrasundar*

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna ... .. 488

*Bhattacharyya, Prof. Somnath*

The Contemplative Mind ... .. 140

*Brahmachaitanya, Br.*

Grisha Perelman: The Madness of Knowledge ... .. 547

*Brahmeshananda, Swami*

Fruits of Contemplation ... .. 417

Medicine at Crossroads ... .. 654

Obstacles in Contemplative Life ... .. 76

## C

*Chousalkar, Prof. Ashok*

Political Philosophy: The Indian Perspective ... .. 606

## D

*Desai, Dr Pratima D*

Vanaprastha Ashrama for the Present Age ... .. 664

*Dev, Trailokyanath*

Reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna ... .. 597

*Dey, Chandi Charan*

Sanitation as a Movement: The RKM Lokasiksha Parishad Experience ... .. 363, 429

*Durgananda, Swami*

The Cosmos in Western and Indian Thought ... .. 483, 536

*Dutta, Dr Amartya Kumar*

Bijaganita of Bhaskaracharya ... .. 545

## G

*Gangananda, Swami*

The Hajj: Unity in Diversity ... .. 581

*Ganguli, Prof. Bharati*

On Ethics, Education, and Swami Vivekananda ... .. 192, 247

*Gokulananda, Swami*

Preparations for the Contemplative Life ... .. 45

*Gupta, Dr Saibal*

Jerusalem: Crossroads of History ... .. 575, 641

## H

*Hansbrough, Mrs Alice M*

Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda ... .. 172, 241, 293, 343, 385, 438,

*Hariharan, N*

Madurai, the Legendary Temple City ... .. 202, 251, 299

*Hegde, Prof. B M*

Rethinking Medicine ... .. 659

*Hiranyagarbha*

Tales from the Library ... .. 490

## I

*Ishatmananda, Swami*

The Leader ... .. 319

## K

*Kali, Devadatta*

Devi: Sri Sarada ... .. 268

*Kannan, Dr K*

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment ... .. 370, 434

*Kapoor, Dr Kapil*

Philosophy of Language in the Vaiyakarana Tradition ... .. 463, 530

*Karthikeyan, N*

A Thai Monk's Glorious Crusade ... .. 679

*Khan, Maulana Wahiduddin*

Contemplative Spirituality in Islam ... .. 133

*Kutty, Dr Bindu*

The Neurophysiological and Psychoneural Aspects of Meditative Practices ... .. 146

## L

*Lal, Pritha*

Creativity: A Paradox between Method and Madness ... .. 324

*Long, Dr Jeffery D*

The Philosophy of Religion: From East to West and Back Again ... .. 469

*Longmire, Linda*

Creating Cultural Harmony: The Spiritual Path of the Heart ... .. 421

## M

*Mahaprajna, Acharya*

The Jain Contemplative Tradition ... .. 109

*Mitra, Dr N L*

Social Seismography in Indian Legal Philosophy... .. 616, 685

*Mohanty, Prof. J N*

Philosophy in the Twenty-first Century ... .. 459

*Mukhyananda, Swami*

Contemplation on Om, the Gayatri, and the *Mahāvākyas* ... .. 29

*Mukunda, Dr N*

Philosophy of the Physical Sciences ... .. 506, 584

*Murty, Prof. Vijaya Kumar*

A Brief History of Indian Mathematics ... .. 517

## N

*Nandakumar, Dr Prema*

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Buddha Kanchi ... .. 349

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Jina Kanchi ... .. 398

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Shiva Kanchi ... .. 444

Kanchipuram, the Four-fold Glory: Vishnu Kanchi ... .. 492

*Neelima, B N*

Women in Buddhism: the Dawn of a New Era ... .. 277

*Nirvikalpananda, Swami*

Household Waste Disposal and Urban Domestic Farming ... .. 390

## P

*Pande, Dr Suruchi*

*Ulūka*—The Owl in Sanskrit Literature ... .. 375

*Pandya, Dushyant*

Swami Vivekananda's Letters to Haridas Desai ... .. 178

*Pankaj, A P N*

Ahimsa and Hinduism ... .. 668

*Paranjape, Dr Makarand*

The Philosophy and Aesthetics of Rasa ... .. 524

*Paul of Jesus, Father*

Knowledge, Love, and Union: A Glimpse into the Christian Contemplative Tradition ... .. 128

*Prabhananda, Swami*

The Contemplative Tradition in the Ramakrishna Order ... .. 15

*Purnananda, Swami*

The Vaiṣṇava Contemplative Tradition ... .. 87

## R

*Raju, Dr T R*

The Neurophysiological and Psychoneural Aspects of Meditative Practices ... .. 146

*Rao, Dr Vinayak*

Understanding Leadership ... .. 338

*Ravindra, Dr P N*

The Neurophysiological and Psychoneural Aspects of Meditative Practices ... .. 146

*Reddy, Dr C Venkata Madhava*

Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Religious Ideas in the 21st Century ... .. 231

*Revathi, M*

Signs of Hope: Countering Tsunami Effects through Natural Processes ... .. 393

*Roland, Dr Alan*

The Contemplative Life and Psychopathology ... .. 150

*Roy, Dr Bimal Kumar*

Raja Rammohan Roy: His Political Views ... .. 625

## S

*Sarvadevananda, Swami*

Worship and Contemplation... .. 63

*Sarvapriyananda, Swami*

Time Management: First Things First ... .. 334

*Sarvottamananda, Swami*

The Philosophy of Mathematics ... .. 512, 590

*Satyarupananda, Swami*

Quest for Excellence ... .. 317

*Satyaswarupananda, Swami (Editor)*

Crucibles of Culture ... .. 557

Minding Our Environment ... .. 361

Politics, History, and Swami Vivekananda ... .. 605

Practising Peace ... .. 409

Reflections on Philosophy ... .. 457

Remembering Swami Vivekananda – I ... .. 169

Remembering Swami Vivekananda – II ... .. 217

Skilled Service ... .. 653

The Contemplative Mood ... .. 4

The Indian Intellectual Tradition ... .. 505

The Religious Organization ... .. 313

Worshipping Devi Saraswati ... .. 265

*Sengupta, Dr Dipak*

Walking the Buddha Path ... .. 569, 636

*Sivaramkrishna, Dr M*

Ethics: Some Contemporary Views ... .. 477

The Many-splendoured Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta ... .. 197, 541

*Sivasubramanian, Dr V*

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment ... .. 370, 434

*Smaranananda, Swami*

A Visit to China ... .. 672

Contemplation in an Active World ... .. 12

Three Visits to Sikkim ... .. 559

*Stavig, Dr Gordon R*

Swami Vivekananda on the Economic Plight of India ... .. 183

*Subbiah, Prof. Ganapathy*

In Search of an 'Indian' Philosophy of History ... .. 612

*Subramanian, Dr V V*

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment ... .. 370, 434

*Sudesh*

The Cosmic Shakti in Action... .. 226

*Sulekha, Dr S*

The Neurophysiological and Psychoneural Aspects of Meditative Practices ... .. 146

*Sure, Rev. Heng*

The Heart of Mahayana Buddhist Practice in the West ... .. 120

*Suryanarayanan, Dr T S*

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment ... .. 370, 434

*Swaminathan, Dr S*

Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith: Focus on Environment ... .. 370, 434

**T***Tadananda, Swami*

Contemplative Practices in Śaivism ... .. 102

*Tathagatananda, Swami*

Japa: Instrument of Love for God's Name ... .. 50

Sir Charles Wilkins's Fundamental Contribution to Indology in the West ... .. 620

Swami Vivekananda's Devotion to His Mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi... .. 220, 287

*Tattwavidananda, Swami*

All-inclusive View of the Vedic Seers... .. 23

*Thakar, Vimala*

Some Thoughts on the Contemplative Life ... .. 139

*Thorup, Janice*

Quiet and Peaceful Life, A ... .. 380, 424

**V***Varishthananda, Swami*

Varanasi: Home of the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service ... .. 689

Varanasi: The City of Light ... .. 564

Varanasi: The City of Saints, Sages, and Savants ... .. 630

*Varma, Dr Raj Lakshmi*

Sri Sarada Devi: the Eternal Value ... .. 274

*Vedananda, Swami*

Harmony, Inner and Outer ... .. 412

*Vijayam, Sri Ramakrishna*

Unfolding Youthful Energies... .. 186, 234

*Vimalatmananda, Swami*

The Śākta Contemplative Tradition ... .. 95

## Book Reviews

Aṣṭāṅga Nighaṇṭu —Ed. P V Sharma, trans. K S Viswanatha Sarma ... ..	695
Ayurveda and the Mind —Dr David Frawley ... ..	695
Bhaskaracharya's Bijaganitham —Dr V B Panicker ... ..	551
Book on Happiness, The —Bô Yin Râ; trans. B A Reichenbach ... ..	164
Book on Life Beyond, The —Bô Yin Râ; trans. B A Reichenbach ... ..	164
Channelling Youth Power —A Vedanta Kesari Presentation ... ..	600
Concise Introduction to Indian Medicine, A —Guy Mazars; trans. T K Gopalan ... ..	696
Consciousness: A Deeper Scientific Search —Ed. Jonathan Shear and S P Mukherjee ... ..	694
Cyclonic Swami: Vivekananda in the West, The —Ed. Sukalyan Sengupta and Makarand Paranjape ... ..	208
Developments in Indian Philosophy from Eighteenth Century Onwards: Classical and Western —Ed. Daya Krishna ... ..	551
Devimahatmyam: In Praise of the Goddess —Trans. and comm. Devadatta Kali ... ..	401
Dvâdaśa Stotram of Śrī Madhvâcārya —Trans. Kowlagi Seshachar ... ..	159
Encountering Kali: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West —Ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J Kripal ... ..	162
Ethics in the Mahabharata: A Philosophical Inquiry for Today —Sitansu S Chakravarti ... ..	498
Experiencing the Soul: Before Birth, During Life, After Death —Ed. Eliot Jay Rosen ... ..	402
Four Yogas, The —Swami Adiswarananda ... ..	157
Hindu Pilgrim Centres —Swami Harshananda ... ..	258
Humanism of Swami Vivekananda —Lekshmi R ... ..	450
I Believe —Karan Singh ... ..	260
In Quest of Self —Prabhakar Ananthaswamy ... ..	451
In Search of Spiritual Values —Swami Prabhānanda ... ..	158
Insights into the Bhagavad Gita —Vimala Thakar ... ..	158
Legend of Rumi, The —Dr K Hussain ... ..	308
Loving God —Baba Virsa Singh ... ..	600
Mahāmudrā and Atiyoga —Guiseppe Baroetto ... ..	160
Meditation Without Gurus —Clark Strand ... ..	260
Nature of the Whole: Holism in Ancient Greek and Indian Medicine, The —Vicki Pitman ... ..	648
Overcoming Anger —Swami Budhananda ... ..	307
Pilgrimage into the Poem Divine: A Study of Bhagavad Gita —N Hariharan ... ..	599
Prajnanananda: A Spiritual Biography, Swami —Kunja Bihari Kundu ... ..	306
Ramakrishna Temple at Nagpur, Sri —G Venkataramana Reddy ... ..	210
Rāma Saga, The —Dr Ramanath Tripathi; trans. Prof. Prabhat Kumar Pandeya ... ..	161
Rituals, Mantras and Science: An Integral Perspective —Jayant Burde ... ..	306
Seven Commandments of the Bhagavad Gita, The —J P Vaswani; comp. and ed. Dr Prabha Sampath and Krishna Kumari ... ..	499
Spiritual Quest and the Way of Yoga, The —Swami Adiswarananda ... ..	353
Sterling Book of Hinduism, The —Dr Karan Singh ... ..	696
Sterling Book of Indian Classical Dances, The —Shovana Narayan ... ..	648
Students' Vows (Vidyarthi Homa Mantras) —Swami Nirvedananda; trans. Swami Atmashraddhananda ... ..	355
Studies in Vedanta —Ed. P George Victor and V V S Saibaba ... ..	497
Sureśvara's Vārtika on Śārīraka Brāhmaṇa —Shoun Hino and K P Jog ... ..	259
Tales from the Puranas —Subhash Mazumdar ... ..	209



There is a Beautiful You within You — <i>N D Khetarpal</i> ... ..	161
Tilak: His Life and Teachings (First Part), Swami — <i>Sivaraman</i> ... ..	500
To the Youth: Your Questions and Our Answers — <i>Swami Harshananda</i> ... ..	451
Vedanta and Its Philosophical Development — <i>A Ramamurty</i> ... ..	598
Vivekananda and the Emergence of India through Spiritual Culture (Illustrated), Swami — <i>Comp. Swami Sarvasthananda</i> ... ..	258
Vivekananda in Contemporary Indian News (1893–1902) Vol. 2, Swami — <i>Ed. Sankari Prasad Basu</i> ... ..	647
Vivekananda's Economic Thought in Modern International Perspective: India as a Case Study, Swami — <i>Dr Sarup Prasad Ghosh</i> ... ..	598
Vivekananda, World Teacher: His Teachings on the Spiritual Unity of Humankind — <i>Ed. Swami Adiswarananda</i> ... ..	449
What India Should Know — <i>V Lakshmikantham and J Vasundhara Devi</i> ... ..	403
What Makes People Give Their Best — <i>N H Atthreya</i> ... ..	210
Yoga of Kashmir Shaivism, The — <i>Swami Shankarananda</i> ... ..	354
Yoga: A Synthesis of Psychology and Metaphysics — <i>Swami Rajarshi Muni</i> ... ..	450

## **List of Reviewers**

Bhattacharyya, Prof. Somnath ... ..	403, 696
Chakraborty, Prof. Amalendu ... ..	259, 498
Chatterjee, Dr Visvanath ... ..	161, 209
Chatterjee, Prof. Shoutir Kishore ... ..	449, 500
Dutta, Dr Amartya Kumar ... ..	551
Goswami, Dr S C ... ..	694
Gupta, Dr Saibal ... ..	696
Karlekar, Hiranmay ... ..	648
Mandavia, Dr Chetana ... ..	648
Manohar, Dr P Ram ... ..	695
Mukhopadhyaya, Dr Satkari ... ..	160
Nandakumar, Dr Prema ... ..	402, 600
Patil, Dr N B ... ..	159, 450, 599
<i>PB</i> ... ..	164, 258, 259, 260, 355, 451, 600, 648, 696
Saibaba, Prof. V V S ... ..	354, 552
Sanmatrananda, Swami ... ..	500, 600
Sarvapriyananda, Swami ... ..	210
Sarvottamananda, Swami ... ..	210
Satyamayananda, Swami ... ..	306, 308
Shukla, Dr Priyavrat ... ..	158
Sivaramkrishna, Dr M ... ..	158, 164, 499
Sundaram, P S ... ..	210, 451
Swamy, Dr N V C ... ..	260, 307, 451
Tadananda, Swami ... ..	355
Varadharajan, Prof. V ... ..	598
Verma, Dr Krishna ... ..	162
Vireshananda, Swami ... ..	160, 308, 403